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# The Missionary and the Local Church

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## Missionary Resiliency: Thriving on the Field

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# FEATURE ARTICLE

## Editor's Note, Fall 2024

Zane Pratt, IMB Vice President for Training

The church is God's ordained instrument for the evangelization of the world. This is obviously true of the universal Church, but it is equally true of local churches. As Baptists we believe that the local church is fundamental to the life of every Christian disciple and essential to the mission God has given them. A church is a group of baptized believers in Jesus who are committed to each other to be the body of Christ to one another and who assemble regularly to carry out the functions assigned to them by Scripture. Those functions include biblical evangelism, discipleship, worship, preaching and teaching, prayer, the biblical ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, fellowship, membership, biblical leadership, giving, accountability and discipline, and mission. Every Christian needs to be a committed member of such a local church, and no Christian can be healthy otherwise.

How, then, do local churches engage in global missions? They do so on every level. Local churches are responsible for the most important part of missionary preparation. Missionaries are disciples of Jesus who cross geographic, linguistic, and/or cultural boundaries to make disciples for Jesus where Jesus is not yet known. Discipleship is the core of missionary preparation, and discipleship happens biblically in the context of a local church. Only as local churches faithfully disciple their members will effective missionaries emerge. Local churches also have the primary responsibility for challenging their members to missionary service and for assessing their readiness for deployment. Churches should include the imperative of global missions in their regular worship, prayer, and teaching. They should spur their members on to radical obedience. They are also in the best possible position to assess the gifting and maturity of members who desire missionary service. Not all

churches know how to assess missionary readiness, so the International Mission Board provides a detailed process for churches to use. Still, local churches are in the best position to determine if and when their members are qualified to be cross-cultural missionaries.

Local churches send missionaries. What happens then? The experience of missionaries on the field runs the gamut from abandonment to micromanagement. Some missionaries leave for the field and never hear from their sending churches the entire time they are overseas. Others have well-meaning sending churches that try to direct their daily lives from halfway around the world. The ideal is regular support and encouragement that recognizes the limits imposed by distance. Similarly, the issue of church membership is highly debated. Do missionaries remain members of their sending churches – churches they do not attend for years full of people they never see face to face? Does the sending church retain strategic oversight over the missionaries it sends? As proponents of meaningful church membership, we are convinced that missionaries must join churches where they serve (either churches they plant or existing churches on the ground), and those churches have the primary responsibility for pastoral care of the overseas workers.

Missionaries go to the field to plant or strengthen local churches. Biblical mission is church-centric mission. Disciples are made in the context of local churches. Healthy church formation is an integral component of the missionary task. Church planting is messy, but we do not believe that we can faithfully fulfill the Great Commission without it.

In summary, local churches train, assess, and send missionaries to plant and nurture local churches among the nations. This issue of the *Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions* explores what that means. The authors of these articles bring years of experience in a variety of settings to bear on the subject. It is our prayer that these articles will spur churches to more faithful mission engagement and spur missionaries to more faithful church formation.

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# FEATURE ARTICLE



# A Biblical Understanding and Practice of Missions<sup>1</sup>

Mark Dever

Is bigger and faster always better than smaller and slower?

There once was a delicious drink that came with powerful positive side-effects. When this drink was introduced to a new country, everyone loved it. The drink was good and good for them. Some business consultants discovered this new drink and saw potential to make a profit. “Don’t you want more people to taste this amazing drink and benefit from it?” they asked the company owner.

“Of course!” the company owner said. “Then leave it to us,” they responded.

Within a few weeks, the drink went on sale in cities around the country. Rumors about the drink circulated even before a national ad campaign was launched. Yet quickly after the drink’s release, people voiced their displeasure. The drink wasn’t bad, but it was hardly everything that was promised.

The company owner was shocked by people’s negative feedback. His product had never failed before. He raced to a store, opened one of his drinks, and took a sip. “This isn’t my drink!” he exclaimed. In fact, the promoters had changed the formula in order to sell more cheaply and quickly. When the owner insisted on taking back full control, he discovered it was too late. He couldn’t stop the consultants from producing and marketing the cheaper drink. Even

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from *What is a Healthy Church?* by Mark Dever, Copyright © 2024, pp.129-135. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org).

worse, he had a hard time convincing people to try his drink, because they thought they already had, when they had only tried the cheap substitute.

Such is the challenge for any missionary who wants to bring the good news of Jesus Christ somewhere only to discover that watered-down substitutes have already done their damage. Previous, maybe well-meaning missionaries had brought a watered-down version. Like the business consultants, they thought they could make Jesus's news more desirable and easy to spread.

For instance, "Christian" churches and "Christian" missions far too often employ lost people to tell lost people how to have religion rather than sending saved people to tell lost people how God saves through Jesus Christ.

I'm convinced that one of the marks of a healthy church is a biblical understanding and practice of missions. Those are the two things we will consider in this chapter. I pray that as you read this, God will help you understand what he intends for the local church in the Great Commission.

## What Should Churches Believe about Missions?

*Missions* is not a word we find in the Bible, but it is a biblical idea. We use the word to refer to spreading the gospel and planting churches across significant boundaries, especially geographic and language boundaries. While we use the word *evangelism* to refer to sharing the gospel, sometimes with people who don't know it, *missions* is evangelism and church planting in a place and among a people who largely have never heard the gospel. This mission's aim is "to transform the nature of humanity."<sup>2</sup> To transform in what way? To bring more people into a reconciled relationship with God.

This message of reconciliation is the basic storyline of the Bible. The Bible begins with a cosmic scope. It is worldwide. God created a world that was perfectly good, and although humankind fell, God promised to redeem them. God's plan to redeem begins with a pagan man named Abram from an area we now call Iraq. God told Abram, who's name became Abraham, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through his family. This one promise set the trajectory for the rest of the Old Testament—God would bless Israel, the nation descended from Abraham, as a precursor and a means to bless the entire world.

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<sup>2</sup> Rosaria Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant, 2015), 18.

How would God bless the world through Israel? By sending a Jewish messiah through whom God's salvation would "reach the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). That messiah is Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior of the world. After having won the victory through his death and resurrection, Jesus instructed his disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:18–20 ESV)

Jesus commanded his disciples to make disciples of all nations. This wouldn't be easy, and it wouldn't be quick. But Jesus promised that he would be with them, as long as it takes—even to the end of the age.

When Jesus first gave that command and promise, the disciples began sharing the good news with anyone who would listen. The result has been churches planted around the world. And yet there remain many people who live in lands with little or no access to this good news. This is why churches remain on mission to spread the gospel as far as God would give them opportunity.

## **What Should Churches Do in Missions?**

How should churches go about participating in this mission? Let's consider seven ways your local church can pursue a biblical practice of missions.

1. *Learn about God's Word and God's world.* The main way a church becomes a missionary-sending church is by preaching God's word. Our preaching should show the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection. We should also want to make clear that Christ's work is aimed at the entire world, not just our city, state, or nation (Rev. 5:9). Every Sunday we should present the gospel so that non-Christians may believe and Christians be built up.

2. *Pray for the spread of the gospel in other places.* The gospel should be central not only in our preaching but also in our prayers. From private prayers to public ones on Sunday morning, we want to ask God for wisdom to know how he would use us in his mission.

3. *Plan to make your church increasingly useful to the spread of the gospel.* What would it take for the gospel to spread in your area? One answer may be for your church to partner with other gospel-preaching churches so the gospel can be preached in an area that your church is not suited to reach. Think about international communities, areas in your city or state where there aren't already good churches, or college campuses. How could partnering with other churches help advance the gospel in these areas? Another way the gospel could spread in your area would be for you to encourage your members to use their time and treasures to reach out to non-Christians and serve their community.

4. *Support those who go out for the sake of the name who can't or shouldn't support themselves.* Just as the Philippians supported Paul so that he could labor among the Corinthians, it is our privilege, duty, and honor to support those serving in missions today. Through prayer and discernment and with generosity and joy, churches should be raising up, sending out, and financially supporting missionaries who take the gospel where it hasn't already gone.

5. *Send pastors and others to help establish churches in gospel-needy places far away.* The biblical pattern for evangelizing the world is to send preachers and plant churches. Church-centered missions may seem painfully inefficient, but it is how we get to that great multitude finally gathered around the Lamb's throne in Revelation 7. Therefore, churches should challenge members, train pastors, send both, and support them in their work.

6. *Care for those you send.* We cannot care well for our supported workers if we don't know how they're doing. Paul knew as much when he returned to every city where he had preached the gospel to "see how they are" (Acts 15:36). It's important for your church to remain in contact with your supported workers as well. Knowing how they're doing will help your church assess how to best serve them in their needs.

7. *Wait for a faithful witness to be established and help those sent out to endure.* We want our workers to be faithful to the gospel. One way we help them remain faithful is by refusing to pressure them to produce numbers. Often in missionary contexts, fruit comes only after years of laboring. That is why the partnership between your church and the workers you send should be built on patience and a long-term commitment to faithful gospel preaching.

## **Conclusion**

In one sense, missions is where all the marks of a healthy church lead. I once asked a worker in a closed country how we could better support him. He said, “Keep working to make your church healthy, and work to make more churches like it, because if you don’t, there won’t be anyone left to send out more missionaries like us!” That’s ultimately how we love God and love others, isn’t it? Healthy churches spreading the gospel and planting more churches among the nations. So meaningful membership in a healthy local church is the first step toward a biblical understanding and practice of missions.

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# PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE

# Partnership in the Mission: Missionaries and the Local Church

Chuck Lawless

## Introduction

I suspect my story is a bit different from most. I was not raised in a Christian home, and I knew nothing of the gospel until a 12-year-old seventh-grade classmate in Ohio told me about Jesus. Though I fought against his evangelistic efforts, I ultimately decided to attend church one time with our neighbors—who just happened to be Southern Baptists. I did not know it at the time, but that first visit to a church would lead to a lifetime of Southern Baptist involvement.<sup>1</sup>

That church gave a large percentage of our offerings to the Cooperative Program, the Southern Baptist mechanism for supporting missions and ministries.<sup>2</sup> They did not necessarily explain it well, and they did not connect us enough with missionaries we were supporting—but they did prioritize budget giving toward the Cooperative Program. I at least had some knowledge of the CP when I started pastoring at age 20.

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<sup>1</sup> *Some of the autobiographical material in this article first appeared at <https://chucklawless.com/2024/06/a-thank-you-letter-to-southern-baptists/>.*

<sup>2</sup> *<https://www.sbc.net/missions/the-cooperative-program/about-the-cooperative-program/>*

In fact, I quickly became a recipient of Cooperative Program dollars. The 19 people in that small country church in Ohio could not afford a pastor. I would have gone there simply because I wanted to preach the Word, but the church was a Southern Baptist congregation—which meant they had access to financial help. My first paycheck in ministry consisted of funds from my local church, our local Baptist association, our state convention, and the Home Mission Board (now NAMB). I was hardly getting rich, but cooperation and coordination allowed me to get started in ministry without needing another job. That level of cooperation and coordination has marked my ministry since then.

My goals in this article are fourfold: (1) remind local church pastors and leaders of our Great Commission responsibility; (2) remind missionaries and missions workers of our privilege because of the generosity of local churches; (3) encourage missionaries who may feel alone today, and (4) say “thank you” to churches and cross-cultural workers who are getting the job done. In those directions, I now turn.

## **Reflections of a Pastor and Professor**

I served as a full-time pastor in two churches for a combined fourteen years prior to becoming a seminary professor. I loved serving the local church, and I have great memories of those days. As I reflect on those years, however, I now see so much I could have done better, particularly regarding missions support.

First, I did not adequately fulfill my responsibility to push my congregation toward the global call of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). My friend David Horner, who led a globally-minded church for decades, wrote these words that still convict me years later: “A vision for becoming a missions-shaped church must begin somewhere. . . . if the pastor has no sustained interest in or passion for missions, a vital component of church life will be neglected, and I might add, to the detriment of the people and the spiritual health of the congregation.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David Horner, *When Missions Shapes the Mission: You and Your Church Can Reach the World* (Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 14.



I fear I was guilty of this kind of neglect as a pastor. I preached the text of Matthew 28:18-20, but I suspect I treated it more as the end of a book rather than as a launching pad for missions.

Second, I should have done a better job of explaining our denomination's method for supporting missions. I had a general understanding of the Cooperative Program, and I learned by association that Southern Baptist churches generally give toward that effort. What I did not fully recognize was that the CP gave my small church an opportunity to be part of a much greater global gospel effort; I failed to help them see that though they gave fewer dollars than larger churches, their sacrifice still supported thousands of missionaries.

Third, I failed by not regularly introducing our members to missionaries. Both churches I pastored gave at least 10 percent of our undesignated offerings to the Cooperative Program, but I failed in the same way I think my own home church failed: I did not help our members connect with real people and the real ministries we were supporting. Frankly, I did not know enough about missionaries on stateside assignment ("furlough" back then), and I knew nothing about how the International Mission Board home staff could help me. Hearing from our missionaries was thus infrequent for my congregation.

Fourth, as a pastor, I neglected to *call out the called* to step into ministry. I was prepared to talk to folks who initiated a conversation with me, but I did not challenge believers to consider that calling in the first place. Even in the few years when I taught the annual international missions study in December, I simply told the stories of others; I did not exhort members to ask if God's story for them included missions service. My guess is that I did not realize that was my responsibility, and I may have been hesitant to send out our best even if God did call them. I know better on both accounts now.

I began Ph.D. studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at the end of my fourteenth year of pastoring. There, two missions professors—both who had served with the International Mission Board—pushed me to open my heart more widely to involvement in missions. Their Word-based challenge to make disciples among the nations and their contagious passion for missions changed my perspective in ways I would never have imagined. My heart began to break over lostness because of two professors who themselves had been missionaries and were still serving as seminary professors,

recipients of the generosity of Southern Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

Now, as I write this article, I am beginning my twenty-ninth year as a seminary professor. I have also just passed my sixteenth anniversary as a stateside worker with the International Mission Board. I have the privilege of helping train potential and outgoing missionaries, and I am humbled and challenged by their faith and obedience. I listen with open and amazed ears when they tell me of God's call on their lives, often to go to places of great darkness and significant risk. All of us—professors/trainers and missionaries alike—get to do what we do because Southern Baptists give to this work. We do not know their names, and they do not know ours, but we share this work with these faithful believers. As a veteran recipient of their generosity, I pray I am stewarding their investment well.

## **Suggestions for Missionaries**

I love missionaries, to whom I now direct this article. I honor you as my heroes. Working with you is one of my greatest joys. Thus, I trust you know that I speak to you from a heart of gratitude and service. With that background in mind, here are my encouragements to you.

First, love the local church. I have been studying the North American church for more than 25 years, and I confess it can be frustrating to see how inwardly focused they can be. At the same time, though, I often think about the apostle Paul's approach to the believers in Corinth. At the beginning of 1 Corinthians, Paul told them that he always thanked God for them, knowing God had gifted them and would complete his work in them (1 Cor 1:4-9). At the end of the letter, Paul concluded with the most intimate closure of all of his letters: "My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 16:24). He started the letter with thanksgiving and ended it with affection—and everything in between says, "You are an absolute mess!"

Even when it is messy, the church is God's plan—his "means to accomplish his work."<sup>4</sup> Believers may not always follow faithfully. They may give more attention to buildings than missionaries may like. They may, in fact, be woefully ignorant of the global map—but they are still God's people. Perhaps

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel L. Akin and R. Scott Pace, *Pastoral Theology: Theological Foundations for Who a Pastor is and What He Does* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 150.

foundational to the church being God's plan, the church is the bride of Christ. We best serve in partnership with them when we are grateful for them and love them.

Moreover, members of the local church make it possible for you to obey God's plan for your lives without worrying about funding. Through their sacrificial and generous giving to the work of missionaries whose stories they often do not know, church folks graciously support field work. The IMB may budget your support, but the funds come from local churches who love you—and who welcome your love in turn. I, too, get to serve the Lord in my various roles because of generous Southern Baptists.

Second, pray for the local church who sent you. Even if they have not always ministered to you as much as you might wish, they need your support. Intercede for the pastors, asking God to give them a heart for the nations. Pray their leaders will not succumb to the wiles of the enemy. Pray they will call out the called and send others to the field. They may never know you are interceding for them, but I am certain they would be grateful for the prayers of missionaries who walk faithfully with the Lord. Your prayers can make a difference on both sides of the ocean.

Third, keep your prayer supporters informed about your work. I have not walked fully in your shoes, but I suspect it is easy to overlook supporters in the States when your focus is on the unreached in front of you. I can tell you from experience, however, that there are believers waiting and ready to pray for you. Many of you already have recruited those prayer warriors, in fact—but they do not always know the best way to pray for you. A simple, concise communication regarding your needs can address that issue.

We want you to know that you are not alone. Southern Baptists around North America are praying for you—some of us interceding for you on your birthdays. Many of us give to our local church trusting that some of the funds will help you do what God has called you to do. We have your back, and we want to encourage you in any way we can from a distance. Do help us intercede for you with intentionality and focus by keeping us informed of your needs.

Fourth, plant healthy local churches. In my assessment, healthy churches both reach the lost with urgency and train the saved with conviction. They evangelize and disciple, recognizing that each one feeds off the other. They so ground believers in the Word that those believers turn there for guidance; as I have written elsewhere, “churches built on scriptural truth produce be-

lievers who aren't afraid in the storm."<sup>5</sup> You have the opportunity to help address the problem of unhealthy churches by planting healthy churches from the ground up—so, do it well in the power of God with the support of prayerful believers undergirding your efforts. Plant churches with the help of the church.

Finally, delight in the local church on your stateside assignment. Here, I turn full circle to the first point in this section of this article: love the church. Those 19 believers in the first church I pastored may not have been discipled well, but they loved me as their pastor, tolerated me when I was unwise, and pushed me to do whatever God wanted me to do with the rest of my life. I love the local church because they loved me first. I pray you delight in the church, too, and will enjoy serving alongside them, telling your story, and challenging them when you are stateside.

## Conclusion

Mark Dever has written that the church is “God’s instrument for bringing both the gospel to the nations and a great host of redeemed humanity to himself (Rev 5:9).”<sup>6</sup> It is indeed that, even with all its imperfections and flaws. God uses messy churches uniting with other messy churches, as Gregg Allison has reminded us, “for the purposes of cooperative and more effective ministry, the sharing of resources, mutual accountability, and the like.”<sup>7</sup> Together, we reach the nations and raise up others to follow after us. Together, we lock arms to march into the darkness. Somehow, it is all quite beautiful.

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5 Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 37.

6 Mark Dever, “The Doctrine of the Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 603.

7 Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 32. Kindle Edition.

# The Work Missionaries Do: Itinerant Church-Planting

J. Snodgrass

Local churches send missionaries out to *do* something. In the seminal passage on local church *sending* in the New Testament, the church in Antioch sends out Saul and Barnabas to do “the *work* to which” the Holy Spirit had called them (Acts 13:2). What was that work they were to do? The remainder of Chapters 13 and 14 reveal their work was making disciples of the nations through ground-breaking, itinerant church planting.

The Book of Acts shows that this *work* was not restricted to Saul and Barnabas or to their first missionary journey in Acts 13-14. Several different disciples, across different contexts, are pictured undertaking this *work*. Furthermore, in his letters Paul frames and commends this *work* as he and other coworkers carry it out.<sup>1</sup> Exegetically, then, the *work* emerges from these narrative accounts of Acts and the epistolary comments of Paul. Where we see missionary workers in Acts following repeated patterns of Gospel ministry and where we hear Paul in his letters commend those practices, we’ve found the outlines of this missionary *work*.<sup>2</sup> This New Testament picture of workers

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1 See Schnabel’s comments on a “paradigmatic” reading of Paul’s statements about the missionary task. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 376-7.

2 This hermeneutical approach of looking for repeated patterns in Acts follows the IMB Foundations guidelines on interpreting Acts: “The more frequent an exemplary pattern of behavior is found in the Book of Acts, the more instructive weight it should carry with us.” IMB, *Foundations*, v. 4 (2022), 156.

going out from churches to do ground-breaking, itinerant church planting, serves as the prototype for the modern-day missionary pattern of the people of God.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Work Revealed in Acts**

In Acts 13:4, after the commissioning in Antioch, Saul and Barnabas travel from place to place carrying out the work they'd been sent to do. In Acts 14:21-23, toward the end of their journey, Luke captures a summary snapshot of their ministry activities, and in doing so helps to define the general outlines of the *work*. When they arrive in Derbe, Saul (now called Paul) and Barnabas “preached the gospel to that city and...made many disciples” (Acts 14:21a). They then returned to the cities where they had previously worked, “strengthening the souls of the disciples” (Acts 14:22). Finally, “when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:23). Luke’s summary account of their work in verses 21-23 provides a snapshot of the work they had done previously in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. In each place they had preached the Gospel, made disciples, planted churches that needed elders, and then appointed those elders. Their final step was to depart that region and return to Syrian Antioch.

When they return to Antioch, Luke makes the rather remarkable statement that they returned to Antioch, “where they had been commended to the grace of God for the *work that they had fulfilled*” (Acts 14:26; author’s emphasis). What had they done to *fulfill* (or complete) the work the Spirit had sent them to do? They had gone to new places (Salamis, Perga, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe), preached the Gospel, disciplined and encouraged believers, started churches, appointed elders in those churches, and then moved on. This work was *fulfilled* to the point that they could leave those churches and return to the church that had sent them out. The *work (to ergon)*, given by the Holy Spirit in 13:2 and then recurring in the summary statement in 14:26, functions as a narrative envelope, wrapping together the account of their ministry in Chapters 13 and 14.<sup>4</sup>

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3 For a fuller defense of the assumptive hermeneutical approach of this article—that modern missionaries should emulate Paul—see David Paul, “Validating Pauline Emulation as a Missiological Hermeneutic in Second Timothy,” *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 22.2 (2023): 61-79.

4 Robert C. Tannenhill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Vol. 2: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 181-82.

What is the significance of this account of the *work* in Acts 13 and 14? Does it carry weight beyond the first missionary journey as an indicator of a more broadly applicable missionary pattern? While it is true that Luke uses the term *work* only once more in Acts, in a reference back to the first journey (Acts 15:38), the record of Paul and his coworkers' ministry throughout Acts 16-21 shows that—though the word was not used—the pattern of the *work* was at the core of their missionary efforts.

The second and third journeys follow the same basic outline as the first: Paul and his team set out from Antioch, enter new places, preach the Gospel, make disciples, establish churches, and move on. Paul and his companions followed this pattern in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), Corinth (Acts 18:1-16), and Ephesus (Acts 19:1-41). The *work* they did throughout Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia followed the pattern of ground-breaking, itinerant church planting shown in Acts 13 and 14.

But what about the missionary efforts of others in Acts? Was this itinerant pattern simply a feature of Paul's unique apostolic calling or did others follow it as well? When the persecution following Stephen's martyrdom scattered God's people from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-3), the missionary work of the people of God began in earnest. As "those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4), their pattern of *work* previewed the path that Paul would later follow.

Philip, the first worker mentioned after the scattering, did the *work* in "all the towns" of Samaria (Acts 8:40). The people of the city of Samaria, "when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ...were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Peter and John, having come from Jerusalem to witness the Samaritan work, were also "preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8:25). Throughout Samaria, then, not just Philip but also Peter and John went from town to town, breaking new ground with the Gospel message, so that "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied (Acts 9:31)."

Acts 10 shows that Peter did the *work* among Cornelius and his household in Caesarea. As Peter preached, "the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word," and "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:44b,46a). Afterward, as word spread of God's work among the Gentiles, Pe-

ter returned to Jerusalem to testify that God’s salvation was for the Gentiles also (Acts 11:1-18).<sup>5</sup> Peter’s first recorded missionary encounters—in Samaria and in Caesarea—both follow the general outline of ground-breaking, itinerant church-planting *work*.

Anonymous believers from Jerusalem also undertook the *work* when, according to Acts 11:20, they traveled to Antioch and “spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.” The result was that “a great number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). Barnabas recruits Saul to help this fledgling church, and “For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people” (Acts 11:26b). This is, of course, the Antioch church from which Saul and Barnabas would later be commissioned. In this case, unnamed believers, scattered by persecution, had done the ground-breaking *work* of preaching, discipling, and starting what would become the first church to intentionally send missionaries in the New Testament.

The Book of Acts clearly and repeatedly shows the people of God, from apostles to evangelists to anonymous believers, sent out to do the *work* of ground-breaking, itinerant church planting. It is, in fact, the only pattern of missionary work depicted in the Book of Acts. That in itself should commend this pattern of the *work* to any modern audience trying to discern the basics of Biblical missions. The narratives of Acts are not, however, the only source of this pattern. Paul, in his statements about his and his coworkers’ ministry throughout the New Testament, frames their work in the same way, as ground-breaking itinerant church planting.

## **The Work of Paul and His Coworkers**

When Paul spoke and wrote about his ministry, he pictured himself as a foundation layer, a rather overt reference to this ground-breaking style of work. In Romans 15, Paul famously wrote, “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”” (Rom. 15:20-21). This statement, given between Paul’s testament to his *fulfilled* church planting work from Jerusalem to Illyricum (vv. 17-19) and his hoped-for work in the unreached regions of Spain (vv. 22-24), reveals how Paul conceived of

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<sup>5</sup> Paul later greets the church in Caesarea on his way to Antioch after the 2<sup>nd</sup> journey (Acts 18:22), showing that the work done there by Peter and Philip had resulted in a church being started there.



himself fundamentally as an itinerant ground-breaker, a pioneer church planter among those who had “never been told of him.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1 Cor. 3, Paul again calls himself a *foundation-layer*. Referring to his church-planting work in Corinth, Paul says, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation...” (1 Cor. 3:10).<sup>7</sup> Acts 18 provides the account of Paul’s *master builder* work in Corinth, where he “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks” and “many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:4,8). His foundation-laying included extensive discipleship and instruction, for he “stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11). This was a recurring practice in his foundation-laying work, so much so that he could refer back to his teaching and his lived example before the Corinthian believers: “I urge you then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, *to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church*” (1 Cor. 4:17; author’s emphasis).

When Paul uses foundation-laying as a metaphor for church planting, he is identifying his ministry as both ground-breaking and as itinerant.<sup>8</sup> He recognized that, in Corinth, others were “building upon” the foundation he had laid (1 Cor. 3:10). This metaphor of foundation-laying fits the pattern of his ministry as shown throughout the New Testament. He was compelled to move on from the foundations he had laid in order to carry the gospel to places and peoples it had not yet been. He worked not just to start a church, but to start many churches in different places, and so he worked itinerantly. The very fact that he was *writing* to the church in Corinth instead of simply preaching to them in person as their pastor testifies to the transient nature of his work.

This commitment to itinerant church-starting was not simply a feature of Paul’s work. Among the many named as Paul’s in the New Testament, several of them are shown following this pattern of pioneer church-planting. Priscil-

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6 For a fuller account of Paul’s conception of his pioneering work as a church planter, see Paul Bowers, “Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of the Pauline Mission,” *JETS* 30/2 (June 1987), 185-198.

7 Fee notes that Paul’s usage of the grace of God here indicates that his foundation-laying work “would refer especially to his apostolic task of founding churches.” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Rev. Ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 148.

8 Schnabel, *Paul*, 334-41.

la and Aquilla started churches in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), in or around Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19), and were leading a house church in Rome (Rom. 16:3-5a). Paul commissioned Titus to “put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town” where they had worked in Crete, thereby fulfilling the foundation-laying pattern in that region (Titus 1:5). When that work was complete, Paul expected Titus to leave Crete and join him in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12). Silas, soon joined by Timothy, walked by Paul’s side through his Macedonian ministry, where they laid the foundation of churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and probably in Berea.<sup>9</sup> Epaphras, a native of Colossae, had apparently planted the church in Colossae and the surrounding cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis and was now sending greetings back to those churches as a “fellow prisoner” with Paul (Col. 1:7; 4:12).<sup>10</sup>

Of Paul’s many “coworkers” in the New Testament, those listed above are most clearly shown to be engaged in itinerant, ground-breaking work.<sup>11</sup> Given the relative prevalence of the pattern—from the Acts account and Paul’s description of his own work and his commendation of specific church planters listed above—it’s reasonable to assume that this pattern of work prevailed across the community of New Testament missionary coworkers. The recurrence of the term within Paul’s circles suggests that *coworker* (συνεργός) may be the best Biblical approximate to our modern concept of missionary.<sup>12</sup>

This does not mean that the specific work of each *coworker* looked exactly like Paul’s—they weren’t all necessarily the ground-breaking evangelists in each new place. Their ministries, however, contributed to and revolved around the core *work* of itinerant church-planting, a task that included proclaiming

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9 Luke’s mention of “Sopater the Berean” as one of Paul’s companions in Acts 20:4 makes a strong case that a church was functioning in Berea.

10 Paul writes to the Colossians that they had “heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel...just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant” (Col. 1:5,7). F.F. Bruce calls Epaphras the “evangelist of the Lycus valley, for there were flourishing churches in that area—in Hierapolis and Laodicea as well as in Colossae.” F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 44.

11 At least 17 people are specifically called *coworker* (συνεργός) in connection to Paul. Over 50 people are mentioned as Paul’s associates in the missionary task. For a full list of Pauline associates, see James D. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem, Christianity in the Making, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 566-571.

12 “They [συνεργός and συνεργέω as used by Paul] identify a person who is active with and like Paul as a representative of God in the mission ‘work’...of proclamation. The συνεργός is thus Paul’s fellow worker, fellow missionary, mission colleague... The συνεργός is also not Paul’s ‘helper,’ ‘companion,’ or ‘servant,’ as the word has repeatedly been mistranslated.” W.-H. Ollrog, “συνεργός,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 304.

the Gospel, developing disciples, planting new churches, appointing leaders, and assisting in their ongoing maturity, as they moved from place to place.

Significantly, none of this broader circle of coworkers is ever called elder, overseer, or pastor. Given the prominence and importance of that office in the New Testament, it is striking that none of these missionaries appear to have taken it up. The local, lengthy ministry of an elder is an honorable one (1 Tim. 5:17) and one that qualified men should aspire to (1 Tim. 3:1). The role and work of an elder is different, however, from the prevailing pattern of missionary work found in the New Testament. Rather than staying to pastor the churches they planted, the coworkers in the New Testament fulfilled their ministry by planting churches that would appoint their own elders and become sending churches themselves.

## **Released to the *Work*: From Church to Churches**

The missionary coworkers of the New Testament came from local churches. Whether by God's sovereign scattering through the Jerusalem persecution or by the Spirit-led sending of Saul and Barnabas at Antioch, local churches were the source for these missionary coworkers. The church in Jerusalem supplied the first wave of sent-ones: Philip, Peter, the anonymous believers who traveled to Antioch, Barnabas, John Mark, and Silas. The next wave of coworkers would come from the newly-planted churches themselves.<sup>13</sup>

At the start of his second missionary journey, Paul recruited Timothy from the church at Lystra, one of the Galatian churches founded on his first journey (Acts 16:1-3). Part of the fruit of Paul and Barnabas's *fulfilled* work in Lystra was a new missionary coworker. The trend would continue as workers from churches planted by Paul joined him in the work.<sup>14</sup> The list of Paul's companions in Acts 20:4 demonstrates this reality rather clearly. Excepting Timothy, whose hometown was already known, Luke lists the origin of each of the other 6 traveling companions of Paul. They represent a cross-section of the regions where Paul had planted churches on his journeys: Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, and Asia. Now, as Paul was concluding his work in those regions and headed toward Jerusalem (and on to Rome), his team consisted of coworkers from the churches he had planted.

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<sup>13</sup> Schnabel, Paul, 134.

<sup>14</sup> Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 50-51.

The picture is now complete: the pattern in the New Testament was for churches to release believers to be coworkers in the *work* of ground-breaking, itinerant church planting. Coworkers went out from local churches, joining with others from local churches to do the work together. The relationship between local churches and missionary coworkers was reciprocal—churches sent church planters who planted churches that sent more church planters. This spiraling pattern of partnership between local churches and coworkers defined the expansion of Gospel work in the New Testament. For those who seek to continue that Gospel expansion to the ends of the earth, this pattern defines it still.

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# Missionaries as Provisional Pastors

Ross Frierson, Mikko Sivonen, and Ricky Don Wilhelm

“We send missionaries and not pastors. Missionaries should not serve as pastors, on the field.” These two statements heard by Luke, a newly appointed missionary at his orientation, created confusion. He knows that his field supervisor serves as a pastor in his local church, and a major portion of Luke’s first term will be spent in a church planting pastoral apprenticeship.

The confusion is not, though, about the phrase, “We send missionaries and not pastors.” There is broad agreement that the church sends out missionaries. The confusion is about the church planting missionary’s role once he lands. Within the scope of this article, we are not saying that every missionary sent to serve on a church planting team should serve as a pastor in a local church. However, we will argue that missionaries serving provisionally in the office of pastor is a biblical model for healthy church formation.<sup>1</sup> As an

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Testament uses the terms pastor/shepherd (4:11; 1 Pet 5:2), elder (Tit 1:5; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4), and overseer (Tit 1:5; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4) to refer to the same office. So, where the various titles are used in this article one office and function are in view. As we argue for the necessity and NT precedent for some missionaries serving as pastors, we have in mind that this is on a provisional basis. Baptists have historically recognized the two offices in the local church as that of pastors and deacons. However, one can see a strong case, both biblically and historically, for a third office—the evangelist. We want to allow for the possibility that the evangelist is a missionary who serves as a provisional elder and functions in ways almost indistinguishable from that of a pastor in the setting of church planting and revitalization. Nevertheless, due to our current historical and ecclesiological context, we felt our argument would be most clearly understood with the terminology of some missionaries serving as provisional pastors. For a thorough explanation of the office and function of an evangelist see: Ricky Don Wilhelm II, *Where There is a Church: A Biblical Investigation into the Work of an Evangelist and Its Implication for International Mission Board Team Leaders in Established-Church Locations* (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).*

implication, some elder qualified missionaries must be sent out to form new churches, serving as pastors temporarily.

## Types of Missionaries

Is it biblically accurate to say that missionaries cannot or should not fulfill a pastoral role? This question requires us to think about what we mean by missionary. Certainly, the term has been used in a plethora of ways depending on one's historical and cultural context. The English word *missionary* comes from the Latin translation of the New Testament word ἀπόστολος, or apostle, meaning "delegate, envoy, messenger."<sup>2</sup> The Greek word ἀπόστολος finds its root in the verb αποστέλλω meaning "send out."<sup>3</sup>

The New Testament demonstrates two uses of "apostle(s)."<sup>4</sup> The first use of *apostle* is the technical sense with reference to those commissioned as Christ's authorized delegates or witnesses.<sup>5</sup> Paul's own defense for his apostolic authority serves as a key for understanding apostleship. The biblical criteria for authoritative apostolic identity appear to be 1) the Lord's selection (Matt 10:1–7; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1); 2) eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:3, 21–22; 1 Cor 9:1–2; 15:8); and 3) authoritative gospel preaching and teaching confirmed by miracles (Mark 3:14–15; Acts 2:19, 43; 5:12, 29, 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12).

What was the role of the Apostles?<sup>6</sup> The Apostles established the authoritative message of the universal church. When Jesus told the Apostles, "you will

2 For a definition of "missionary" see William David Taylor, "Missionary," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 644. For a definition of "apostle" see "ἀπόστολος," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG], eds. William Bauer et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 122. Hereafter BDAG.

3 "ἀποστέλλω," BDAG, 120-121.

4 For an extended argument see chapter 2 of, Wilhelm, *Where There is a Church*, 58-88.

5 1 Cor 14:37; 15:1-4; 2 Cor 13:3; Gal 1:8-11; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Col 1:25-28; 1 Thes 2:13; 2 Pet 1:16-21.

6 The authors hold to the position that Apostles and Prophets were a universal church role which ceased to have new officers in the first century. Their ministry continues to build up the church through the pages of Scripture. However, their universal office did not disqualify Apostles from also serving in a local church office. This multiple-role, apostolic model presents itself in the NT. Peter indicates dual role calling about himself in 1 Peter. In the introduction of the letter, he presents his universal function and authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1). Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 50. Wayne Grudem points out the significance of this introduction saying, "The supreme importance of the apostles is suggested by the fact that the phrase 'of Jesus Christ' is attached to no other New Testament office: we do not read of 'teachers of Jesus Christ' or 'prophets of Jesus Christ' or 'evangelists of Jesus Christ', only of 'apostles of Jesus Christ'. Those who held this office had authority at least

be my witnesses” (1:8), he indicates a sense of authoritative teaching as those who will “affirm, guarantee, and interpret the facts about Jesus.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, the apostles’ witness was not merely evangelizing or teaching, but their own personal verbal endorsement of the correct teaching and interpretation of the gospel, which served as the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20).<sup>8</sup> God vindicated the apostolic witness through signs and wonders.<sup>9</sup>

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*equal to the Old Testament prophets, for the apostles could speak and write God’s very words (Acts 5:3-4; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 2:13; 14:37; 2 Cor 13:3; Gal 1:8-9; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:8, 15; 2 Thess 3:6, 14; 2 Pet 3:2) and thus could write the words which became New Testament Scripture (1 Cor 14:37; 2 Pet 3:16, cf. Rev 22:18-19; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 3:14).” (Wayne Grudem, 1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary, vol 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009], 51). However, in chapter 5, Peter also identifies his local-church role when he describes himself in the office of “fellow elder.” Furthermore, textual evidence suggests that Peter wrote this letter while living in Rome (Grudem, 1 Peter, 194). Historical evidence confirms that Peter served in a church in Rome until his death (Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Peter, The Apostle,” in Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988], 1666). By calling himself a fellow elder, Peter shows that he didn’t serve in a universal capacity alone. He served locally as an elder in Rome, like the other pastors/elders/overseers to whom he wrote. In Paul’s case, he exercised a universal church office as an apostle appointed by Christ. He labored to lay the church’s foundation among the Gentiles. However, in relation to the identity of his local-church ministry, Paul functioned as an evangelist (i.e., provisional pastor).*

- 7 Peter Bolt explained the uniqueness of the Apostle’s teaching with the following points: “**μαρτυρέω** is used for God endorsing his word by signs and wonders (14:3)...In addition, the prophets testify to Jesus and forgiveness (10:43), and Paul, in agreement with them, testifies to Jesus’ suffering, resurrection, and proclamation (26:22f)...As such, they could testify that it was”this Jesus” who had been raised by God (2:32; cf., 3:15), in accordance with the prophetic witness (10:43; 26:22), and who has made forgiveness available (5:31-32).” Peter G. Bolt, “Mission and Witness,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 170-171.
- 8 Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 93. In the article by Robert Thomas, he emphasized the revelatory language of Ephesians 2:19-3:10, which demonstrates this text was talking about inspired teaching of the apostles and prophets in the foundation of the church. Thomas says, “To apostles and prophets the word of God in Christ was revealed in a unique way (cf. 3:5). Because they received, believed and witnessed to that word, they were the beginning of the building on which others were to be built (cf. Matt 16:16-18).” Robert L. Thomas, “Correlation of Revelatory Spiritual Gifts and NT Canonicity,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 8:1 (Spring 1997), 8.
- 9 Additionally, in Acts 13:47 Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6 in reference to their specific part in the apostolic function saying, “For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Thus, in Acts 8, 10, 13, Luke further clarifies the apostolic witness as a necessity to validate that God’s presence dwelled in the non-Jewish church. With the presence of the elders, the church, and the Apostles, the Jerusalem Council ratified this witness that the gospel “offers divine favor as a free gift to be received by faith; it rejected human effort as a means of or contributor to salvation. By implication it also dissociated Christianity from any attempt to restrict it to a particular racial, national, cultural, or social group.” In other words, the Apostles witnessed and verified the presence of God dwelling among all nations, thereby unifying the church. In Acts, Luke does not portray all of the apostles as “traveling evangelists.” Clark pointed out, “the apostles are closely associated with a stationary role in Jerusalem rather than a missionary one.” So, he concluded, “More emphasis is given to their role of legitimizing others and their work than their own evangelism. The denotation of ‘apostles,’ at least as far as the Twelve is concerned, is thus much more ‘authorized delegates’ than ‘missionaries.’” Andrew C. Clark, “The Role of the Apostles,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998),

The second New Testament use of *apostle* is in the generic sense of someone sent for a specific task. In this case, ἀπόστολος would best be translated as *missionaries* and gives credence to churches sending a variety of missionaries contributing to the body of Christ and the mission in different ways.<sup>10</sup> For example, in Philippians 2:19–30, Paul told the Philippians about his desire to deploy other missionaries to the church in Philippi and informed them that he planned to send their missionary (ὑμῶν δὲ ἀπόστολον), Epaphroditus, back to them (2:25). The rest of the letter fills in some details about Epaphroditus' missionary service. The Philippians sent him to pass on an offering to Paul in support of his mission (4:17–18). Epaphroditus determined to stay and minister to Paul (2:25).<sup>11</sup> He had apparently been away in this support role for enough time that he had “been longing” to see his sending church (2:26). He had suffered on the mission field (2:26, 30) and deserved honor for his ministry (2:29).

Some argue that there are two types of missionaries—the Paul-Type and the Timothy-Type. The idea is that the Paul-type goes to pioneer places and establishes new works then quickly moves on, but the Timothy-type works in a more pastoral role where the church is already established.<sup>12</sup> However, the Scriptures do not support these categories. Timothy was active in pioneer ministry with Paul and served itinerantly in various locations. Timothy's first appearance in the New Testament shows him traveling with Paul to plant churches in Macedonia (Acts 16:15). Also, Paul faithfully served in a church when he was in a location with an established-church.<sup>13</sup> The Scriptures do not record missionaries as solely focusing on pioneer church planting. Paul

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210. As authorized delegates of Christ, the Apostles had a universal jurisdiction which other ministers do not possess, nor should be aspired to.

10 See IMB's definition of a missionary: “The one who is a disciple of Jesus set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church, to cross geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic barriers as part of a missionary team focused on making disciples and multiplying churches.” *International Mission Board, Foundations*, v.4 (Richmond: IMB, 2018), 86. [https://issuu.com/trainingdev/docs/imb\\_foundations](https://issuu.com/trainingdev/docs/imb_foundations).

11 Rick Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 32, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1991), 120.

12 For example, John Piper has suggested two categories of missionaries that he calls “Paul-type” and “Timothy-type.” He described the Timothy-type missionary as one who works where someone else had already begun and the Paul-type as one who moves from place to place. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 195. Brooks Buser follows Piper's argument here: Brooks Buser, “A Better Way to Look at Missions,” *9Marks*, May 21, 2024, <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-better-way-to-look-at-missions/>.

13 See Acts 15:41 and 16:5. When Paul plans to visit Rome, even though he is just passing through he says that he hopes to “reap a harvest among you” (Rom 1:13) and “eager to preach the gospel to you” (Rom 1:15).



made it his “ambition to preach the gospel not where Christ has already been named” (Rom 15:20). At the same time, Paul had an equal ambition to strengthen local churches. He had a deep concern for putting a church in order which would help secure health in that local church (Acts 14:22–23; 15:36, 41; 14:22–23; 16:5; 18:23; 20:2). And like Paul, Timothy also was heavily engaged in itinerantly strengthening existing churches.

Furthermore, Scripture gives no indication that Timothy settled in Ephesus as a permanent pastor.<sup>14</sup> Rather, he fulfilled the itinerant work of a missionary. The immediate context of 2 Timothy 4 makes this clear: “Do your best to come to me soon....When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments” (2 Tim 4:9-13). Luke consistently portrayed Timothy’s ministry as itinerant.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, when Paul tells Timothy “fulfill your ministry” (τὴν διακονίαν σου πληροφόρησον), Paul was urging Timothy to begin wrapping up his ministry in Ephesus, so that he could rejoin Paul as was his custom.<sup>16</sup> More will be said below to support the view that Paul and Timothy both served in a similar manner.

Epaphroditus’ missionary role was of no less value than that of Paul’s as the church planter, but it was different. Paul, like Timothy and others, labored as an elder. Epaphroditus aimed to support the work of the elder-qualified missionary that fruit might increase (Phil 4:17). This example provides a biblical precedent for the need of missionary support roles in organizational leadership, finance, logistics, member care, and other spheres.

One could see this to mirror a pastor–deacon relationship. Churches may send short-term, mid-term, long-term, male, and female missionaries that fill gaps which missionaries serving as pastors may not have the capacity to fill. Examples include outreach and disciple-making to women, students, or employees in the workplace. However, if we want to effectively plant churches

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<sup>14</sup> *Contra Eusebius, HE, 3.4.6.*

<sup>15</sup> “And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.” (Acts 19:22); “...Silas and Timothy remained there....and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.” (Acts 17:14-15); and “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia....” (Acts 18:5).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Yarbrough explained, “‘Fulfill’ (from **plērophoreō**) is a word used only once in the NT outside of Paul’s writings. Here it means to carry out completely; to leave nothing undone.” Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, *Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 442.

and see the gospel take root among the nations, we must send missionaries who have the qualifications and abilities to lead a church.

## **Goal of the Missionary as Pastor**

Paul himself asserted that “he [Timothy] is doing the work of the Lord, as I [Paul] am” (1 Cor 16:10).<sup>17</sup> So, in his letters to Timothy, Paul was not only describing the expectation for Timothy’s ministry, but he was also describing the substance of his own work in the local church. What did this ministry of Paul and Timothy entail? Paul’s first letter to Timothy depicted his expectations for how Timothy should fulfil his task. In 1 Timothy, Paul told the young missionary, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (3:14–15). With these verses, Paul made a clear statement indicating missional instruction: he expected to find Timothy serving—in the household of God, which is the church of the living God (ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ..., ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος). This missionary would carry out his mission in and through a local congregation.

Since Timothy had the duty to preserve sound doctrine in Ephesus, he would most effectively do so by investing his energies into the church, which God designed to display and support the truth of the gospel.<sup>18</sup> Even a face-value reading of Paul’s letters to Timothy make it inescapably clear that these missionaries were shepherding the flock. The first three chapters of 1 Timothy appear to lay out the blueprint of how Timothy should “behave in the household of God” (3:15) to form a healthy church by turning his attention to the church’s doctrine, the church’s worship, and the church’s leadership.<sup>19</sup>

## **Forming Sound Doctrine in the Church**

Paul’s instruction to Timothy greatly emphasized the importance of sound doctrine in a church (1 Tim 1:3; 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3). In 1 Timothy 1:3-11

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 425.

<sup>18</sup> Yarbrough said, “In connection with ‘the truth,’ ‘pillar and foundation’ likely points to the church’s role (through their confession of Christ; see v. 16) in combatting soul-destroying error at Ephesus in the form of false teachers and their deleterious effects,” *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 219.

<sup>19</sup> For an extensive argument see chapter 4 of the dissertation, Wilhelm, *Where there is a Church*, 122-153

Paul addresses how false teachers (which seem to include Hymenaeus and Alexander [1:20]), had led the church astray – “contrary to sound doctrine” (1:10) – with speculative teaching about the law as opposed to using it “lawfully” (1:8). In 1 Timothy 4, Paul again returned to the subject of false teachers, then exhorts Timothy with a series of mandates: “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed” (4:6); “train yourself” (4:7); “Command and teach these things” (4:11); “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (4:13); “Do not neglect the gift you have” (4:14); “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this. For by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:6-16); and “Do not rebuke...harshly but exhort” (5:1). In both letters combined, Paul used approximately thirty imperatives dealing with Timothy’s study and preaching responsibilities.<sup>20</sup> Paul and Timothy prioritized preaching and teaching sound doctrine to form healthy churches.

## **Forming Right Worship in the Church**

After the establishment of the church in Jerusalem, Luke described them as a worshiping community (Acts 2:41–47). In matters of corporate worship, Baptists traditionally for the most part have adhered to the Protestant regulative principle which holds that, “worship should only include those elements that Scripture explicitly or implicitly endorses.”<sup>21</sup> The elements of worship on which the missionary should focus may vary depending upon a church’s weaknesses. Paul and Timothy instructed and modeled how God glorifying corporate worship forms healthy churches. For example, in 1 Timothy 2:1–15, Paul provided instructions for the Ephesian church when he charged Timothy to strengthen their corporate prayer (1–7)—which would spur on the missional vision—and correct matters of personal conduct in worship (8–15). Paul sent Timothy because this young missionary possessed a level of theological aptitude to help this congregation comprehend the substance of the apostolic teachings and to apply that teaching to their corporate worship practices.

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<sup>20</sup> John A. Battle, “Pastoral Imperatives: Paul’s Use of The Imperative Mood in His Letters to Timothy and Titus,” *WRS Journal* 12:2 (Aug 2005): 12-19.

<sup>21</sup> John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2019), 277.

A similar task stands before some missionaries sent today. Churches will need missionaries with the competency to identify distorted elements of worship and guide them to gospel-reflecting practices. As Mark Dever reminds us, “Christians and congregations are transformed into Jesus’ likeness by looking at his glory as we find it in Scripture. The implication for our corporate worship services is that every element and form of our gathered worship should show people from Scripture God’s glory in Christ so that we can all be transformed together into an ever more faithful reflection of that glory.”<sup>22</sup> Dever highlights the practical implications of what occurs when a missionary is skilled in handling the Word of truth to lead others in worship: Christ-centered worship changes lives.

## **Forming Qualified Leadership in the Church**

Having established God’s design for male eldership in 1 Timothy 2, Paul then sets forth the qualifications of church officers in chapter 3. Both elders and deacons should exhibit a godly moral character that would be an example to all members of the church. However, elders should have the ability to teach (3:2). Through their congregational teaching ministry, the elders instruct the church which supports the growth of sound doctrine, and deacons meet the felt needs of the congregation which allows overseers to focus on the ministry of teaching and prayer (Acts 6:1-7). Cultivating a doctrinally sound church requires both officers to fulfill their roles.

In 2 Timothy, Paul vividly illustrates the correlation between sound doctrine and elders. Paul told Timothy, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (1:13–14). Then, he continued with this admonition, “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2:2). Paul indicated that these “faithful men” would be those who serve as elders and, therefore, should carry out the teaching duties before the church.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *How to Build a Healthy Church: A Practical Guide for Deliberate Leadership* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 99.

<sup>23</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 51.

The missionary must possess the competency and a plan for raising up church leaders, but a missionary also must heed Paul's warning not to "be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Tim 5:22). Paul encouraged his apprentice to exercise patience in the election of church leaders because the church cannot always discern the character requirements for overseers quickly (3:2-13). Some men disqualify themselves early on because their character flaws are obviously present, but others' may become apparent only with time (5:24).<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, while some men markedly stand out as potential leaders, some may exhibit necessary qualifications only after a season of growth (5:25).<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Paul and Timothy exhibited patience in the formation of qualified elders.

### **Practicalities of the Missionary as Pastor**

As God's image bearers (*Imago Dei*), humans are imitators. We learn virtually everything by imitation. Indeed, to master any virtue or skill, one must start by imitating a person who portrays those desired characteristics. Imagine various family roles such as motherhood or fatherhood, or vocations like a farmer, a teacher, or a truck-driver. To become skillful in any of these roles or vocations, one must learn first from other experts what faithfulness and excellence look like. For example, the idea of a man taking over a farm without first serving as an apprentice under a competent farmer is foolish. Learning by imitation has been the standard and proven way to teach since the Old Testament times (e.g. Exod 23:24; Prov 4:14). The tradition at the time of Jesus was for disciples to choose a rabbi and follow him with the goal being mastery of the Torah.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Paul encourages believers to imitate him as he imitates God and Christ (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; Eph 5:1-2). Furthermore, even Socrates and the consequent school of pedagogy—the Socratic method—recognize the value of this type of learning.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Timothy MacArthur Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 225-226.

<sup>25</sup> MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 226.

<sup>26</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Ward Farnsworth, *The Socratic Method: A Practitioner's Handbook* (Godine, Boston, 2021).

## **Missionary Pastor Models Faithful Eldering**

Jesus modeled his servant leadership among the apostles for three years. His mimetic way of teaching is worthy of imitation. For three years Jesus taught, demonstrated, and lived in the presence of his Father and his followers. He prepared the apostles to exegete faithfully the Hebrew Scriptures in light of his own life, teaching, death and resurrection, and consequently to write New Covenant Scriptures, to witness boldly amid persecution, and to live sacrificially without holding anything back.

It is the regular pattern we see that churches appoint pastor-teachers to shepherd newly founded churches. These new pastors need to be trained alongside mature, tested, and qualified pastors. This is exactly what Paul expected Timothy to do in his missionary service. How does the missionary train pastors unless he is modeling the role of a pastor? How does the missionary model handling the Scriptures soundly and faithful teaching and preaching apart from faithfully teaching and preaching? Until local men are trained, qualified and appointed, it is the church planting missionary's responsibility to model the character and teaching of an elder, and he does so by pastoring faithfully the sheep and training, formally and informally, other men to do the same.<sup>28</sup>

## **Missionary Pastor Encourages Local Leadership**

We know Paul stayed only a brief time in Thessalonica before installing elders,<sup>29</sup> and one could use this example as the model for missionary church planting.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Paul warns Timothy not to lay hands too hastily on anyone. A missionary serving as a pastor is called to labor intentionally to train other pastors. Therefore, as soon as possible he is to bring pastoral trainees and candidates to his side. While the missionary carries the main responsibility to shepherd, he intentionally shares pastoral leadership early

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<sup>28</sup> See also Sam Martyn, "Should Missionaries Serve as Elders," April 12, 2024, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/missionaries-serve-elders>.

<sup>29</sup> Paul and his missionary team were in Thessalonica only 3 Sabbaths, and when he wrote to them there were identifiable leaders (1 Thess. 5:12–13). Paul wrote this after Timothy had gone back to Thessalonica, seen that the believers were thriving despite persecution, and evidently saw enough to know that there were qualified men to lead to some extent. We don't know how long Timothy stayed in Thessalonica.

<sup>30</sup> Don Dent, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles: The Forgotten Foundation* (Westbow Press, 2019), 158-159.

on. From day one, his intention is to pass on his role to local pastors. However, this takes time.

Tom walked into a church plant on its second public gathering.<sup>31</sup> He had recently been baptized and married to Maria. Sixteen years later, he still walks to the same church every Sunday, now having served as a faithful pastor for the past nine years. It took seven years to see this faithful young man mature to take responsibility in his marriage, with his children, and in his ability to faithfully handle the Scriptures.

Thomas was a 21-year-old young man, who showed early in his Christian life that he possessed a gift of teaching.<sup>32</sup> He was quickly asked to lead a Bible study and preach his first sermon after he had joined a church plant. His teaching and preaching were solid, and his communication skills were notable for his age. Yet, in his daily living and in his ability to carry responsibility, he showed significant immaturity. He served as a pastoral candidate in the church for almost ten years before Thomas himself, and the church body, mutually recognized him to be qualified to pastor. He is now married with three beautiful daughters and has faithfully pastored four years together with Tom. The church is growing and in the process of planting another church.

No child grows into adulthood in a few months. It takes years of faithful parenting under God's grace. Yet, the day eventually comes for most parents when they must release their children into adulthood. The same applies for missionaries. While parenting takes well over a decade, we are suggesting that it takes several years in the local church context to train a man to be a pastor/elder. Our experience demonstrates that if the man is a recent convert, the training time will be significantly longer.

## **Conclusion**

The Creator of the world is on mission to redeem the entire creation out of chaos, rebellion, and idolatry and to glorify Himself by calling and gathering all the elect, from all the nations, under the lordship of Christ. Jesus Christ is both the perfect Apostle (Heb 3:1) and the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). The Lord has appointed missionaries to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to rebellious sinners and to gather the converted people into local churches.

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<sup>31</sup> *The name is changed for security reasons.*

<sup>32</sup> *The name is changed for security reasons.*

The Lord shepherds His people under His own appointed under-shepherds, pastors.<sup>33</sup>

In this article we have argued that missionaries serving in the office of pastor in a local church (plant) is a biblical model for healthy church formation. Building healthy churches without modeling faithful pastoring is inherently problematic, and not the model given in the New Testament. Qualified pastors, like Luke, the newly appointed missionary in the introduction to this article, must be raised up in their home churches and sent out as missionaries to do the work of forming new churches by pastoring. At the same time, missionary church planters must intentionally raise up other men to shepherd the new congregations, first alongside the missionary and eventually to entrust qualified men to pastor the church. The church sends missionaries, and at least some of them must be sent to do the work of a pastor.

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<sup>33</sup> *Shepherding is one of the main motifs in Biblical Theology. See Timothy S. Laniak, Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible, New Studies in Biblical Theology 20 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006).*



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# Worship and Sacrifice

Richard Livingstone

Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” (Gen. 22:5)

After almost 20 years of service in a particular country of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Lord has led me and my family to transfer to a different country in Africa. While that might sound exciting, there have definitely been some challenges. We are going through the entire process all over again—new place, new people, new language, new culture, new everything. While we have years of African experience to lean on, we have still experienced loneliness, culture shock, and a variety of challenges that caught us completely unaware.

One of the greatest areas of struggle we have faced has been in the area of worship. There are local churches all around us, but we are realizing that they are a good bit different than the ones we had grown accustomed to in our former country of service. The music is really loud and painful, with PA systems that often leave my ears aching and ringing at the end of the day. We have realized that our former country was fairly unique with the incredible giftedness of its singers and choirs. Here the singing is often off-key, off-beat, and with a confusing rhythm that can leave you bewildered at times. Neo-Pentecostalism is infecting the churches, and at times the sermons are theologically suspect and smack of the prosperity gospel. Then, to top it all off, this often happens in a language that we haven't yet learned, and with cultural cues that we don't yet understand.

Yet, despite our struggles with worship, we are falling in love with these people. There is one particular little church nearby that has graciously and warmly received us. They have been so kind and welcoming, and I am beginning to enjoy the fellowship, the friendships, and the community. I can sense the Lord drawing me into them and joining my heart with theirs. I rejoice in that and thank God for that. Yet, while I love being with them, I do not always love worshiping with them; and that pains me deeply. We have to sit in a strategic place so that we won't lose our hearing, and I have to constantly pray through my attitude when showy worship or misinterpreted Scripture makes me cringe. It has caused me to ask some serious questions about myself, my own culture, and my perspective on worship. I am not suggesting that distorted, reverberating speakers in a tiny space is the way to go, but perhaps I have missed an aspect of worship that our Western culture often overlooks.

When I read the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, I am struck by verse 5. Many people are familiar with this text, and we often remark on the significance of God testing Abraham or the foreshadowing of God's sacrifice of His Son for our sins. However, we often fail to recognize that this was an act of worship on Abraham's part. Also, when you read the writer of Hebrews' commentary on this very event (Heb. 11:17-19), you get a glimpse into Abraham's thoughts as he climbed that mountain. He never expected God to stop him. . . he knew God would work things out, but he truly thought he was going to have to sacrifice his own son . . . and he called it "worship."

This tells me that worship is not about me; it's about God and His glory. It's not about my preferences, or where I am comfortable. It's not about what I can get out of the worship or what I find enjoyable. It's not even about what is most beneficial for my children. It's about God's glory . . . about my obedience and my sacrifice . . . and sometimes that is difficult and painful for me. Abraham walked stoically up that mountain, determined to worship the Lord with all of his heart, no matter what it cost him. I am sure he walked down that mountain, hand in hand with his son feeling the greatest joy and peace he had ever felt. The blessings came, but they were on the other side of great sacrifice and ultimate obedience.

And so, I have purposed to root myself deeply in this local congregation. Whatever it takes, regardless of how uncomfortable I am, I will invest in them, not just Monday through Saturday but on Sunday as well. There are at

least four important reasons why I think this is right not only for me and my family but also for others who serve as missionaries in places like this.

### **Perhaps God will give me the opportunity to affect change.**

There are definitely things that are broken in the local churches here. There are issues concerning leadership, worship, church planting, discipleship and so many other things that need to be addressed. How can I address them effectively and see deep-rooted change if I have an aloof relationship with them? In the past, I have tried strategies that involved us living away from the people, driving in to do some programs, driving back out to our more comfortable surroundings, and then lamenting the lack of progress we actually saw. Eventually, I learned that any lasting success would be built on a foundation of long-lasting relationships and doing life with people.

This new city will be no different. If I don't invest in local churches here in a sacrificial way, I will never see genuine change. They will receive the teaching and thank me for my efforts, but at the end of the day, it will still be business as usual when I am not around. My colleagues and I have been lamenting about the state of the worship in local churches in this country that goes beyond simple African cultural forms and is more about Neo-Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion. However, I am not content to just complain about the problems and find places to attend on Sunday where I can avoid them. Instead, I want the privilege to address the problems and to bring the truth of God's word to bear on them. That will never happen unless I am embedded in their lives and in the local church, for better or worse.

### **Perhaps they will have an opportunity to change me.**

I constantly ask myself, "Is this about me and my preferences, or is this about truth and God's word?" I think that is a healthy question to ask because I know that we are all prone to gravitate toward what we know and enjoy. I look around and see Africans who are very comfortable doing things that make me uncomfortable. I don't want to assume that they are wrong and that I am right, without clear biblical evidence that supports my assumption.

After these years of service on this continent, I have learned so much from my African brothers and sisters, and I am a better man for it. Seeing the world through their eyes, looking at the word from their perspective, and experi-

encing life in community with them have made me a stronger, more effective Christian and missionary. I don't want to ever take that for granted. I believe that if I am committed to covenant fellowship with this group of people that I am growing to love, regardless of how I feel about the church services, I will have a chance to address certain issues and they will have an opportunity to expose some of my own shortcomings and make me better.

One thing this whole process has revealed to me is how "me" centered our Western worship is. We approach churches like a buffet and we pick the ones that have the best worship teams, the best preacher, the best location, the nicest gym, the prettiest carpet, and so on. We join churches based on what they offer us. We rarely walk in and join churches based on the things that drove Abraham up that mountain to worship: obedience, faith, sacrifice, and God's glory. Sometimes, the most God-honoring thing you can do is worship where you are most uncomfortable, instead of where you enjoy going!

### **Perhaps this is the best thing for my children.**

I have determined that the best example I can give my kids is for us to be in worship together with local African churches, regardless of what that costs us. I realize that might sound counterintuitive since people often select churches based on their children's needs. Yet, if things are lacking in the worship or if my kids aren't getting every word of this language we are still learning together, that is okay because as their father I can make that up at home in our family worship. There are more important lessons I want to teach them.

I want them to learn to love Africans and to joyously cross cultural boundaries with a zeal that pleases God. I want them to see that in me and to hear that in my voice on Sunday and every day of the week. I want to set the tone that we worship as a family and that means we go together because of Jesus, not for ourselves. I want them to learn that worship is about God and not about us, or what pleases us and makes us the most comfortable. Many ex-pats mitigate the problem by connecting at a local English service of a non-denominational Western church, or by staying home and worshipping as a family. I realize that in some parts of the world, there are no local churches, or if there are, they are not Baptist. That, however, is not the case here. I want my children to see lived out before them that church is local, it is covenant community and it is vital . . . and it doesn't always have to be fun.

## **Perhaps God will be honored and my worship will be more meaningful.**

Finally, I pray that through this commitment to do what is often uncomfortable, it won't always stay that way. I pray that like Abraham, I can go up the mountain to worship out of love and obedience, ready to make the sacrifice that I am not happy about, and then come down the mountain joyful, relieved, and changed, having met the Lord at the top in a way I never expected. I don't want to transform this church into my image, but I do want to invest in them outside of the worship service and inside as well. I do pray that God will give me a chance to speak truth into issues that bring genuine transformation in this small local body, which will in turn begin to shape and affect other congregations that they touch. I pray that my eyes will be opened and if the local church is right and I am wrong, that God will reveal that to us all as we dialogue together around His word. I pray that God will be honored by my willingness to sacrifice personal preference and comfort in order to go deep with these precious people.

I am often amazed at the willingness of myself and my colleagues to leave home, leave all to serve Him, and willingly sacrifice to reach these people with the gospel Monday through Saturday, but then live as if the sacrifice ends on Sunday. I think each of us, even those who live in the West, should ask ourselves this question: when did Sunday stop being about worship and sacrifice, and start being about what benefits us, or what we find most enjoyable? Let the example of Abraham drive you back to the real heart of worship.

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# Commissioned and Carried: One Church's Example of Sending Field Workers Well

Janice Lee

I dreamed that people from my stateside church were carrying me around inside the church building. In the dream, I had shown up at an event that was meant to honor all our missionaries. If this had been a real-life missions service, people might have gathered around each missionary and prayed for us in small groups. In my dream, however, people picked us up and carried us along a designated route (imagine a CrossFit competition where participants carry a teammate as if they were a pole with elbows). A middle-aged teaching pastor with a dad bod was carrying me when he faltered near the finish line. I offered him some (somewhat awkward) encouragement, “Be glad I just lost twenty pounds.”

At that point, I woke up. The dream was laughable, but I woke up that morning thousands of miles away, grateful for the church that carries me. I wondered who was praying for me while I slept.

## Sent Well

I chose to go overseas with IMB because it is a church-based organization. Somewhere in the middle of my application process, I sat in my missions pastor's office, and he told me very directly, “WE are SENDING YOU.” His



promise landed so strongly in my heart that it almost felt like a word from God himself. I am not sent by a parachurch organization. My church sent me.

Sending missionaries overseas does not look like it used to. My church did not stand ashore and wave goodbye as I boarded a ship with all my belongings packed in a coffin. These days, sending missionaries well translates into supporting and serving them on a regular basis. My church supports and serves me and my fellow field workers through regular check-ins, care coaches, a field office and guesthouses on the field, equipping opportunities, virtual meetings, elder support, stateside care, and their all-star advocacy teams. Over the years, my church has learned these effective practices to carry us and our burdens as we all persevere on the mission together. We have weathered storms and trials together, we have mourned together, we have celebrated together, and we have grown together. Below, I have elaborated on the provision and care that have significantly undergirded me and my fellow field workers. I hope my church's experiences and our growth over the years will inspire and encourage other churches as they develop their capacity to support the missionaries they send.

## **Regular Check-ins**

Every four months, my church asks me to submit an online form they call a Personal Leadership Report (PLR). The questions on the PLR address my health, happiness, and holiness. In these reports, I update my personal care coach about my physical and mental health, my relationships, my time with God and spiritual disciplines, my work, my language and cultural acquisition, and my support from the States. My favorite question on this report helps me assess my time management and my purpose: "How would you rate your weekly alignment with your long-term vision over the last four months?" This simple question rejuvenates me and my vision for living overseas, and it helps me course correct when I have strayed from my God-given mission.

The PLRs help me grow in self-leadership while I am physically separated from the church. They motivate me, and they also sound the alarm when I have trouble. My care coach prays through the PLRs I submit, and she emails me a response to what I have written. She encourages me, tells me how she is praying for me, and shares any wisdom I may need for what I am going through.

## **Care Coaches**

My church assigns a care coach to every missionary family. Care coaches are usually staff or experienced field workers with appropriate gifts who have been trained for the role. My own care coach has walked with me through the angst of team conflict and the sadness of a sudden departure from a city I will always love. I have also watched a care team rally around a dear couple as the husband fought an addictive sin. A friend was cared for after she was unjustly arrested. Another friend received care after her husband was murdered. Missionaries need special care. No one comes home without wounds. In the midst of our pain, our care coaches walk with us and carry us through the difficulties.

## **Field Office and Guesthouses on the Field**

When I unexpectedly had to leave the country where I lived, I booked a direct flight to the city where my church has a field office and a guesthouse. The team there welcomed me, housed me, and allowed me to decompress while I sought God and his direction. Shortly after that, they opened another guesthouse on another continent where our overseas workers can find respite and receive counseling as they recover from the challenges of living cross-culturally and bearing the name of Jesus in hard places. The staff in the field office and guesthouses have typically already experienced many of the same losses their guests suffer. These staff teams also serve as care coaches, strategists, and equippers along with the stateside staff. I realize that few churches have the resources and the experienced workers to provide this level of care, so I am extremely grateful for my church's generosity and their commitment to our missionaries and the mission.

## **Equipping Opportunities**

Each year when every member of my church recommits to our covenant with one another, we agree to train and be trained “for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness” (Eph 4:12–13 CSB). My church’s devotion to the equipping of the saints has led them to offer our field workers week-long theology intensives in overseas locations, online leadership courses and strategy training, webinars to help us work with people affected by trauma, free books and

breakout sessions at retreats on the field, links to mission-minded podcasts and articles in their quarterly newsletter for overseas workers, PDF guides to their sermon series, and music downloads from the worship team.

I am not surprised that a teaching pastor carried me in my crazy dream. My church takes their responsibility to equip us seriously. That responsibility does not end when we leave the country.

## **Virtual Meetings**

Occasionally, my church hosts virtual prayer meetings for our field workers. These times nurture our faith and provide mutual encouragement. We once had an online prayer meeting to intentionally address cancer. At the time, several overseas workers were undergoing treatments, and cancer had touched many of us through the years. Several workers had lost loved ones to the disease, and several more had survived cancer themselves. Eventually, two of our field workers died from cancer. This special prayer time had prepared us to care for one another well when we lost them.

Virtual meetings have helped us care for one another amid other tragedies too. My church once had to address an incident of abuse. Hours before the elders addressed the broader church, some elders and a few staff members hosted a virtual meeting for all of us overseas. They informed us, answered our questions, and made a counselor available for those who might have been retraumatized by the announcement. They did not forget us. They made us a priority.

## **Elder Support**

The elders engage in our sending process from the very beginning. They assess and confirm our calling, commission us, and help us prepare to go. They also continue their roles while we are overseas. If we have significant needs, the elders lead a Community of Care for us, especially if we need correction or redirection. They organize these Communities of Care to include counselors, coaches, accountability partners, and prayer partners who provide a safe and stable community for restoration and growth.

When we are back in the States, our elders not only meet with us and pray for us, but they also bring us before the church at the quarterly meetings for members and allow the whole church to pray for our specific needs and challenges. They know these needs and challenges well because they have been

praying for them each time we submit our PLRs. The elders also celebrate with us when God meets those needs and helps us overcome the challenges, and they welcome us home when we transition from the field.

## **Stateside Care**

Each time we travel back to the States, my church asks about our logistical needs for our upcoming time with them. They help us find housing and transportation, medical professionals, or whatever we need. The people of the church often purchase homes with extra space for us or even second homes and extra cars for overseas workers to use while we are in town. The church staff make a point to meet with missionaries for a meal or prayer and a time to debrief.

Periodically, the staff organize get-togethers for the field workers who are in town so we can reconnect and enjoy the presence of dear friends who have walked in our shoes and can understand our lives. Sometimes the church stocks our pantries with groceries or organizes baby showers and meals for new parents. I have watched the church care for families who have returned to the States for high-risk births, intensive medical treatments, the death of a child, and the struggles of adopted children. I cannot imagine a better community when we are in need. The whole church stands ready to help us.

## **Advocacy Teams**

To make sure we have specific advocates for us in the church, each field worker establishes an advocacy team before they leave the country. That team then acts as the communication hub and the first responders for the overseas family. Currently, advocacy teams develop primarily through our church's missional communities (MCs). MCs are small groups that meet off campus during the week and already practice the rhythms of advocacy teams—fellowshipping and praying together. By partnering with missionaries, the MCs embrace a clear missional objective that strengthens their community and encourages their faith. One staff member likes to quip, “Partnering with a missionary and their ministry puts the M in MC.”

Many of the MCs in my church have adopted missionaries. Some have faithfully served their missionary for many years. However, in the life cycle of a small group, advocacy teams sometimes dissolve or resign. Though the loss may concern the field worker, others in the church are waiting to step into

the advocacy role. This transition gives them the opportunity to engage in the mission too.

I established my advocacy team under an older model that involved recruiting specific people to fill specific roles: a team leader, a prayer advocate, a communications manager, a finances and physical needs manager, and a re-entry coordinator.<sup>1</sup> This older model has worked well for me over the years, and I have marveled at the ways my advocacy team has served me. They have provided a place to stay, a car to drive, care when I have been ill, and help with banking, my driver's license, and other administrative hassles that balloon for people who live overseas. To them, their help may seem small, but to me, my advocacy team is my lifeline. They are the people I look forward to seeing when I go back home. I am honored to call them my friends.

## High-Value Support

In March of 2024, my church surveyed our overseas workers to find out which areas of support we valued. The results confirmed an overwhelmingly positive sentiment toward the ways our church serves us. Seventy-six percent of the responses were either “I value this [area of support]” or “I highly value this [area of support].” The most highly valued support was practical, such as financial assistance and finding housing and vehicles for our time in the States. I can attest that the church's generosity and logistical help relieve much stress.

Second to the practical support was the biannual overseas gathering, where the church comes to our side of the world to provide emotional and spiritual support. To me, this gathering feels like a homecoming with friends I have missed, the care and rest I have needed, and the Spirit of God speaking (and singing) in my heart language. I always leave with a full tank of grace (and an overflowing suitcase).

The second section of the survey asked about our interest in potential additional support in the future. The strongest interest in additional support was for on-the-field visits from advocacy teams and church leaders. The overseas workers also highly valued additional on-the-field equipping for marriage and parenting.

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<sup>1</sup> These roles were inspired by Neal Pirollo's book *Serving as Senders Today: How to Care for Your Missionaries as They Prepare to Go, Are on the Field and Return Home, Twentieth Anniversary ed.* (San Diego: Emmaus Road International, 2012).

The third section of the survey asked where the field workers turn for different types of assistance. The results showed that workers usually turn to their sending agencies for crisis management, security parameters, and contingency planning. They typically turn to their field teams for help with visas and logistical needs as well as strategy and leadership coaching. The field workers mostly turned to the church for financial assistance and related needs, spiritual formation, and help in times of crisis. Notably, for crisis management, missionaries turn to all three sources of assistance—sending agencies, field teams, and the church. In these times, everyone works together to provide the needed support.

## **My Responsibility**

The last time I was back at my church's quarterly membership meeting and meal, a caring staff member at my table admitted it was helpful to have me with them because sometimes, when we are out of sight, we are out of mind. I admitted that out-of-sight, out-of-mind is a mutual problem. Sometimes I do not think about them either, so I can understand their need to hear from me and see me regularly. Much like Paul and Silas reported back to the church in Antioch (Acts 14:26–27), I need to keep in touch with the church that sent me. My responsibility to communicate is just as important as theirs. If I want to feel like I am part of the family, I need them to know what is going on in my life, and I need to know what is going on in their lives.

I have learned over the years that the people in my church need me as much as I need them. Even though my church may sometimes treat me as a hero, they are not my fan club. My church family is made up of real people with real struggles. And sometimes they fail. They need me to pray for them as much as I need them to pray for me. I will probably never be able to repay them for all they do for me, but this is not a one-way relationship. We all need care from one another.

## **How Do They Do It All?**

Perhaps this level of sending, supporting, and serving seems untenable to most churches. Fifteen years ago, this was not the reality at my church either. Even now, as a few of the staff reviewed an early draft of this article, one responded, "Our aspiration is always to do the things you've captured in this article, better. At times we are better at some things than others. God has blessed our church to be able to provide the support and services that we

have provided over the years. It is only through his kindness and provision that we do what we feel he has called us to.” Thus far has God helped us.

Another staff member responded to an early draft of this article with the recognition that the church has not always supported field workers as well as they wished. “I would say that the things you have included are true of us at our best, but we could also confess there are many times we have missed the mark over the years.” They are still growing as senders.

I believe the growth has come incrementally as my church has prioritized missions and leaned into God’s passion for the nations to know him. The leaders have disciplined the whole church to be involved in missions—embracing the mission of God, making disciples, praying, caring, advocating, going, giving, and sharing resources. Most church members get infected with God’s heart for his mission through solid biblical teaching in the Sunday services or in on-campus classes and off-campus MCs. People around them also demonstrate what it means to live missionally. Then, when they see God working among them, they dream of seeing him work around the world.

## **We Are Not There Yet**

The greatest leaps my church has made in learning to send field workers came about because one staff member caught God’s vision to send more people than anyone else had dared to dream of sending. Once the stories of the first workers we sent started spreading around the church, the volunteers and their advocates could not be stopped. Since then, my church has not only sent more workers than that staff member dreamed of, but they have also sent the workers well, carrying everyone they have commissioned. My church continues to emphasize their responsibility and their privilege to be a people in whom God multiplies His workers because the fields are ready for harvest.

Still, I woke up from my bizarre dream that morning before my church carried me to the end of the designated route. In reality, as in the dream, we have not yet reached the finish line. We still have far to go. The harvest is much bigger and more beautiful than we imagined.

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# Mobilizing the Next Generation of Missionaries: Gen Z and the Local Church

Sarah Joyner

Recently I gathered with twelve college students to discuss possible Journeyman opportunities and next steps for missionary service. These American students have been serving with us in South Asia all summer. They have battled sickness, endured monsoon season, and had countless cups of chai and gospel conversations over the past few months. Reflecting on this next generation of missionaries, I am hopeful and expectant. I am also acutely aware of the generational differences and challenges to mobilizing the next generation of missionaries.

A careful examination of Gen Z and its impact on missions reveals a clear need for the local church to adapt its missionary mobilization efforts for this generation. The purpose of this article is to explore how local churches can effectively mobilize Gen Z as the next generation of missionaries. As this newest generation of missionaries prepares to be sent out, our sending churches need to understand how Gen Z's unique characteristics affect the development of these new missionaries.

So, what is a missionary? The International Mission Board defines a missionary as “a disciple of Jesus set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent out from the church, and affirmed by the IMB to cross geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic barriers as part of a missionary team focused on making disciples and



multiplying churches among unreached peoples and places.”<sup>1</sup> There is still a need for intentional missions efforts to cross these barriers and take the gospel to the unreached.

With this understanding of missions in mind, what does it mean to mobilize for missions? To mobilize simply means to set something in motion. Erlacher and White’s definition of a mobilizer is helpful for understanding mobilization: “in a mission’s context, a mobilizer is someone who makes movement toward the purposes of God possible in someone else’s life. A mobilizer prepares and positions others to actively take hold of the purpose God has for them.”<sup>2</sup> This points to the local church as a mobilizer. The local church has a leading role in helping Gen Z take hold of the purpose God has for them!

## Who is Generation Z?

A quick glance at today’s mission force shows that it mostly comprises Generation X (born 1965 to 1980) and Millennials (born 1981 to 1995).<sup>3</sup> The next generation of missionaries will be sent from Generation Z. Many of these future missionaries are already participating in short-term opportunities. Gen Z includes those born between 1997 and 2012.<sup>4</sup> This generation is unique in so many ways. For example, the iPhone was launched in 2007 when the oldest Gen Z were just ten. They have grown up with technology at their fingertips and witnessed significant social, educational, and technological shifts in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> These shifts have impacted Gen Z significantly. Millennials adapted to technology as it rolled out, but for Gen Z, it has always been a part of their story. It is safe to say we are still learning how technology and constant connectivity affect us today.

There are certainly unique and significant challenges to mobilizing Gen Z compared to previous generations. Churches must get to know Gen Z if they

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1 International Mission Board, *Foundations* (Richmond, VA: IMB, 2018), 45.

2 Jolene Erlacher and Katy White, *Mobilizing Gen Z: Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Age of Missions* (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2022), 84.

3 Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation* (New York: Penguin, 2024), 5.

4 Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins.” Pew Research Center. January 17, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

5 Jolene Erlacher and Katy White, *Mobilizing Gen Z: Challenges and Opportunities for the Age of Missions* (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2022), 84.

are to help them follow God's calling to the nations. Churches should know what Gen Z-ers value, what their worldview is, and what motivates them. While it would be unwise to stereotype everyone in this generation, key principles will be helpful to understand when seeking to know Gen Z and recognize how best to mobilize this next generation of missionaries.

### Values

Happiness in life is of high value for Gen Z.<sup>6</sup> In addition to happiness, they also value safety and security in their lives. They have been encouraged by their parents their entire lives to avoid dangerous things or taking risks. They have been protected from failure or the opportunity to make mistakes.<sup>7</sup> The anxiety of older adults surrounding them their entire lives makes them cautious in life decisions and far more aware of risk. Another contributing factor to their caution is that they seem to have fewer real-life experiences than previous generations at the same age. This has left them lacking the self-confidence to take risks and try new things.<sup>8</sup>

In the workplace, they value individuality and the ability to use their specific skills or interests. Gen Z has grown up in a world that has targeted their individual preferences and interests from both a marketing and educational perspective. Every experience is tailored directly to them, creating an internal desire for individualism.<sup>9</sup> Not only are they individualistic, but they also want to be authentic and be accepted. They expect their leaders to be genuine and authentic. This generation is entrepreneurial, which seems contradictory to the fact that they are risk-averse. This entrepreneurial bent likely comes from their desire to be in charge of their own schedules and use their skills to impact the world around them.<sup>10</sup>

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6 Erlacher and White, *Mobilizing Gen Z*, 56-57.

7 Robin Paggi and Kat Clowes, *Managing Generation Z* (Fresno: Linden Publishing, 2021), 17.

8 Erlacher and White, *Mobilizing Gen Z*, 47-50, 58.

9 Paggi and Clowes, *Managing Generation Z*, 31-32.

10 Mark C. Perna, "Why Gen Z Is Thriving in the Entrepreneur Life." *Forbes*. June 18, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markperna/2024/06/18/gen-z-thriving-entrepreneurship/>.

## Worldview

The USA has shifted to a post-Christian and post-modern culture which ultimately holds the idea that there is no absolute truth.<sup>11</sup> In addition, there has been a clear rise of the “nones” or those who have no religious affiliation in America.<sup>12</sup> Gen Z has been shaped by this shift in beliefs and worldviews. A postmodern society emphasizes that truth is relative to the individual or the culture, which means this generation is lacking the foundational understanding that there are absolute truths grounded in the very nature of God and his Word. Even believers in this generation struggle to understand their identity in Christ due to the culture around them. While this is partly due to the overall shift as a society, it is also due to the lack of discipleship and participation in church. People keep busy schedules and hectic pace of life, making attending church or Bible studies as often as previous generations even more difficult.

In addition, this generation is truly global. They are connected through technology and ease of travel like no previous generation, giving them a unique perspective on the world.<sup>13</sup> This relates to another unique factor in missions today, the growing global church. As America is experiencing a cultural shift, there is a growing mission shift in the harvest force worldwide. The mission workforce from nontraditional sending countries is greater today than in the past.<sup>14</sup> Countries that have traditionally received missionaries are now sending to the nations.<sup>15</sup> As this shift happens, missionary teams are becoming more diverse. Ideas, experiences, and worldviews can span the oceans and bring common ground for Gen Z globally due to globalization and technology.<sup>16</sup> The local church in the U.S. must recognize the unique opportunity presented by GenZ’s connectedness to partner with the global church to fin-

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11 Erlacher and White, *Mobilizing Gen Z*, 4.

12 James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 21.

13 UNiDAYS. 2020. “The Most Defining Gen Z Traits.” *Www.genzinsights.com*. December 16, 2020. <https://www.genzinsights.com/these-are-generation-zs-most-defining-traits>.

14 Bruce Koch, “The Surging Non-Western Mission Force.” In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009). 370.

15 Philip Lutterodt Lee, Joabe G. Cavalcanti, and Loun Ling, “Perspectives from Global South Christianity,” *Lausanne Movement*, January 3, 2023. <https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2023-01/perspectives-from-global-south-christianity>.

16 Erlacher and White, *Mobilizing Gen Z*, 140.

ish the task. Indeed, the local church's role in discipling the next generation of missionaries is crucial.

### Motivations

Local churches need to understand what motivates Gen Z as they seek to mobilize more missionaries. Previous generations wanted to be invited into something greater than themselves and purposeful. Gen Z is driven by success, flexibility in their schedules, and stability. Millennials longed to make an impact on this world. In contrast, Gen Z seems to view work as a means to financial stability or individual fulfillment in life.<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that Gen Z is afraid of hard work. They will work hard toward success when they understand the value, or they see the reasons behind it.<sup>18</sup> They do, however, want to use their individuality and specific interests or skills in the workplace.<sup>19</sup> It may seem like a minor shift, but understanding this will help Gen Z as they look for opportunities to make individual contributions as missionaries.

## Mobilizing Gen Z

With these realities, how does the local church mobilize Gen Z? Here are five practical ways the local church can effectively mobilize this next generation of missionaries.

### Personal Engagement

There is a feeling of disdain for missions of the past, which not only pushed the expansion of the gospel but was tainted by colonialism. Gen Z doesn't want anything to do with this thinking.<sup>20</sup> They need space to process, untangle, and realize that there is more to missions than past stereotypes.<sup>21</sup> With Gen Z's strong desire to meet needs and fight injustice, local churches need to prayerfully engage with them about methods of missions rather than simply tell them, "This is how it is done." We can define the core missionary task and

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>19</sup> Paggi and Clowes, *Managing Generation Z*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Barna Group and International Mission Board, *The Future of Missions: 10 Questions about Global Ministry the Church Must Answer with the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2020), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Erlacher and White, *Mobilizing Gen Z*, 24.

describe how we do this work, but we need to help Gen Z see this approach in Scripture.<sup>22</sup> As the local church casts vision for missions, it is important to engage with these future missionaries' questions about evangelism and missions strategies.<sup>23</sup> This means that vision casting and mission education must come not only from sermons, studies, and conferences, but also from personal relationships and conversations with mentors, church leaders, and missionaries.

### **Attention to Wellness**

Mental health and wellness are things local churches must also consider as they mobilize Gen Z. In previous generations, new missionaries were not expected to be perfect, but they were expected to show they were healthy and ready to head to the field. Conversations about mental health have even been considered taboo for previous generations. While we still want to accurately assess the readiness to head to the field, we must also begin to understand the realities of Gen Z. This generation has made words like “anxiety” and “depression” daily vocabulary. They are not afraid to share their struggles or talk about the fact that they need help. In the same vein, this generation is paralyzed by fear. These are ongoing realities we cannot ignore in our mobilization efforts.

Sending churches and sending organizations must figure out how to talk with Gen Z about mental health. They need to know how to come alongside missionary candidates and help them find ways to go to the field with the tools and resources they need should they face mental health struggles. It is also important to help them see that moving forward in action can also bring clarity in making decisions. Local churches are thus poised well to help future missionaries walk forward in faithful obedience on the journey to the field.

### **Consideration of Parents**

As churches consider mobilizing Gen Z, they must consider their parents as well. Gen Z's parents' goals are to keep their children safe and see them be successful, which often hinders their support in sending their children to the

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<sup>22</sup> *International Mission Board, Foundations, 9.*

<sup>23</sup> *Barna Group, The Future of Missions, 33-35.*

nations.<sup>24</sup> This is true not only for non-Christians but, unfortunately, also for Christian families. According to Barna, almost half of parents agree with the statement, “I’d rather my child get a well-paying job than be a career missionary.”<sup>25</sup> The support of a parent or lack thereof can have major implications on young people taking steps forward in their calling toward the nations. Local churches discipling and encouraging parents of Gen Z will have major implications on sending.

### Discipleship

In fact, we have already seen in this article that discipleship in the local church is a major element for mobilizing this generation. As Gen Z is disciplined, they will begin to see God’s heart for the nations and hear his call to join in that work. They may not be ready to move overseas today, but ongoing discipleship efforts can help prepare them. The local church helps these future missionaries understand God’s word and learn how to walk with him in faithfulness. The church should model obedience and hold Gen Z believers accountable for their walk.

Another key area for the church to help Gen Z is evangelism. America’s current views on tolerance have shaped Gen Z’s views on evangelism. Many do not embrace gospel sharing even in their current context. So, they will need to be challenged and equipped to share. Local churches must help them understand the why and how of evangelism.<sup>26</sup> If things like Bible study, obedience, and evangelism are not addressed early, they will only be magnified in the face of culture shock and the stress of living in a new place—and this could lead to short-lived missionary careers.

### Short-term opportunities

Along with discipleship, there is a need for short-term mission trip opportunities. This can include opportunities at home or abroad. These missions immersion experiences can be an impactful piece of discipleship and a powerful way to do missions education. Well-planned trips are strategic for missionary teams to reach their people. Simultaneously, much learning takes

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<sup>24</sup> Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation For... Failure* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), 168-169.

<sup>25</sup> Barna Group, *The Future of Missions*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

place in the lives of volunteers. Volunteer teams come back home changed, and they often become interested in missions in new ways.

Learning from experience is important to Gen Z, and the local church can help provide these opportunities as they partner with missionaries to send volunteer teams. Whether sending long-term or short-term workers, the local church can help by focusing its options and partnering deeply with missionary field teams. Gen Z wants to know they can trust the teams and team leaders they are joining. They need to see how they, as individuals, can impact the world around them. Describing the global need for lostness is a key element in recruiting; however, this is not enough with Gen Z. It is also important to help them see how they fit into those global efforts and how their unique skills and experiences will serve those missionary teams. Serving in short-term opportunities can help them see how their unique skills and background can fit into the vision and strategy as a long-term worker.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, the goal of this article (or of the local church) is not to focus on Gen Z's negative traits or all the challenges of mobilizing them to the nations. The reality is that they have much potential. Gen Z is driven. They are uniquely skilled. They are creative and resourceful, innovative, and ready to push past barriers today's missionaries are facing. Gen Z has great potential to impact lostness and a role to play in fulfilling the Great Commission for their generation.

The main idea is that the local church is essential in helping this next generation of missionaries walk in all that God has called them to do and be. While the message or the task does not change, we must be willing to adapt how we mobilize so we do not lose an entire generation of missionaries. The unreached peoples and places around the world are counting on it.

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# How the Local Church Can Develop a Strategy for Healthy Sending and Supporting

Ryan Martin

Churches may see their role in sending members to the ends of the earth as the finish line instead of the beginning of a partnership. Some churches even lose their identity as the lead role in the sending process along the way, turning all responsibility over to a sending agency. That becomes a problem since the church ought to send members and care for them after they arrive on the field.

So why is the local church's role in sending and member care so important for her sent ones? First, the Scriptures speak to the local church's responsibility in setting apart, sending, and supporting missionaries, as in passages like 3 John 5-8, Philippians 2:25-30, and Acts 14:26-28. Second, through my serving in the local church as a missions pastor, spending time on the field, and interacting with missionaries, agencies, and churches on this issue, I see firsthand the need for sending churches to provide faithful missionary care for their sent ones.

Before unpacking the *what* and the *how* of local churches sending and providing missionary care, let's understand the *why* from these three passages of Scripture.



## A Biblical Basis for Sending and Supporting Missionaries

### 3 John 5-8: Sending Forth “for the sake of the Name”

Mack Stiles, missionary to the Middle East, says, “Healthy churches produce healthy Christians who become healthy missionaries.”<sup>1</sup> The local church, both its members and leaders, should be sending and supporting well for the promotion and advancement of the gospel. An example of such a church is in 3 John 5-8 (ESV), as John commends his friend Gaius for sending and supporting well “for the sake of the Name.”

The overriding theological implication in these four verses is that a church sends her missionaries to go out for the sake of the Name. It is because individuals have been saved and gathered into a local body that the church corporately is sent on mission to proclaim that same gospel. This text also strongly supports individuals not only sending and supporting in isolation but also doing so in community. Steve Jennings, pastor of Immanuel Church in Fujairah, United Arab Emirates, posits, “The Scriptures give us a pattern of discipling and sending out. This should be the normal life of a church so that when the younger Christians witness the older Christians walk this path, they better understand what path they have to walk.”<sup>2</sup> While some members are called to go, others are called to stay. Danny Akin exhorts, “We may not physically go where they go, but when we support them, we go with them anyway. We work together, as one, for the truth. Some give support and some are sent. Both are essential.”<sup>3</sup> This rhythm of recruiting, raising up, and releasing is what Jesus talks about when he calls us to “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2).

### Philippians 2:25-30: The Gift of Partnership between Sender and Sent One

The book of Acts reveals that Barnabas and Paul were faithful members of the church of Antioch before being sent out by the church. As they went about evangelizing, discipling, and planting churches, Paul wrote about the partnership he experienced with new believers gathered in local churches.

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1 Mack Stiles, “9 Marks of Healthy Missions,” *9 Marks Journal: Missions* (Fall 2015):31.

2 Steve Jennings, “What Would Happen If You Sent Your Best?,” *9 Marks Journal: Missions* (Fall 2015): 41-42.

3 Daniel Akin, *1,2,3 John*, vol. 38 of NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Reference, 2001), 245.

The *gold standard* of such a partnership could be seen with the church in Philippi. Exploring Paul's partnership with this church and specifically with one of their own, Epaphroditus shows how missionary care serves the persevering work of gospel proclamation. On behalf of the church at Philippi, Epaphroditus carried out the role of a *minister* to Paul, meeting Paul's material and spiritual needs. Such action mirrored what Paul wrote elsewhere in his letter of Christ's sacrificial nature in going to the cross, which is the foundation for Christian partnership.

Despite the service Epaphroditus had carried out for Paul and the Philippians, he longed to be back with his church (Phil 2:26). While the timing is unclear, we later read that Epaphroditus became ill and was in great distress. Ralph Martin writes, "Epaphroditus' longing for his native city and a restoration to his Christian friends there has been variously interpreted as homesickness ... or, a pastoral solicitude for the 'flock' from which he is separated or, more likely, a desire to be back home to defend Paul's gospel."<sup>4</sup>

The surrounding verses reveal Epaphroditus's desire to be back with the church, but also to report all that was carried out on their behalf. The context of these verses helps to explain the challenges that partnership brings as well as emphasize the hand of God that upholds a laborer. In spite of the illness, Epaphroditus came to Paul's aid and was healed in the process according to the mercy of God.

God's hand was guiding Paul's circumstances, Epaphroditus' condition, and the church at Philippi for the sake of the gospel being furthered and God's messenger to the Gentiles being strengthened and encouraged. Epaphroditus had the mind of Christ in his actions, and Paul reminded the church at Philippi (and us) that they should walk in that same example, particularly as it relates to supporting those sent out to further the witness of the gospel.

The crescendo of commendation reached its peak as Paul told the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus with joy and also honor his service (Phil 2:29). Paul received this *sent one* who served with humility and honor, and he then exhorted the church to receive him back in the same manner. What the Philippians could not do because they were not physically able to be with Paul, Epaphroditus fulfilled. Epaphroditus was willing to count the cost and sacrifice his life to do what the church could not do in full. Not only did Paul

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<sup>4</sup> Ralph Martin, *Philippians*, TNTC, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1959, 1987, 2008), 139.

receive the gifts (4:18), but the very presence of Epaphroditus was, in a sense, a gift to Paul as well.

### **Acts 14:26-28: Returning Home-How to Receive, Report, and Re-Enter the Sending Church**

After concluding their first missionary journey through Cyprus, South Galatia, and Pamphylia, Paul and Barnabas returned to the church at Antioch, where they “spent no little time” with the members and reported how God had used them (14:26–28). Both in sending out *sent ones* and receiving them back, the church at Antioch reflects the local church’s crucial role in caring for missionaries through sending, supporting, and receiving. Darrell Bock simply and powerfully states: “Mission drives the dynamic community that Luke describes.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul and Barnabas, set apart and sent out by the church at Antioch in Acts 13:1–3, carry out their first missionary journey by planting churches and establishing elders. Schnabel notes three truths in this section (Acts 13:1–14:28): “The two missionaries have faithfully carried out their mission, so they return to the church that sent them . . . the proclamation of the gospel is the ‘work’ . . . [and] the conversions of the Jews and Gentiles and establishment of new congregations was the result of the grace of God.”<sup>6</sup> Upon their return, they report back to the very church that had commended them to the grace of God, share all that God had done through them, and express how a door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles (Acts 14:26–27).

The return of Paul and Barnabas to the church at Antioch gives us a picture of accountability in mission partnerships and demonstrates the reciprocal nature of care. These men recognized their responsibility to speak back into the life of the church, both by commending the church for their support and by communicating all that God had done through them. In turn, the church at Antioch gained a greater understanding of Paul and Barnabas’s missionary efforts and of how to provide care for those they sent out.

I get most energized by being on the field with missionaries, but a close second is hearing from them while they are stateside. Walking alongside them as they readjust to their *home* culture, providing a listening ear, and com-

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<sup>5</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 308.

<sup>6</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts, ZECNT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 615.

mending them for their service help build their confidence and give honor and care where it is due. The church should seek to hear not only about the work but also about how the missionaries are doing, thereby fulfilling their responsibility to continue discipling their sent ones, both on and off the field.

## **Strategic Elements for Sending and Supporting Missionaries**

Having explored a biblical framework for sending and supporting missionaries well, how does a church apply these passages into the practice of sending and caring for missionaries well? While there are a number of ways that the church can begin to develop adequate sending and missionary care for her sent ones, I will explore four elements related to pre-field, on-field, and post-field missionary sending and care.

### **Assessment and Training – Pre-field Care**

Churches need to work alongside their missionaries and in partnership with the agency during the pre-field stage to assess a candidate's calling and readiness, as well as find the right ministry fit, which will aid in missionary retention on the field and strengthen the partnership among entities. Often, churches tend to be reactive in this stage, rather than proactive in *calling out the called*, and in turn taking the lead on assessment and development. As churches observe and evaluate a candidate's readiness, they have the opportunity to note areas where they can extend care and establish metrics by which to do so. As a missionary candidate is both known in relationship and their gifts are evidenced by a good cross-section of the church, the church can have collective confidence in that candidate's call, character, and competency.

Churches can assess readiness practically by crafting a personal development plan through their pre-field correspondence with the mission agency and field personnel. This will enable the church (sender), missionary (sent one), and agency to know what it is they want this member to *know* (biblical, theological, ecclesiological, missiological knowledge), *be* (Christian character), and *do* (practical ministry equipping). Churches that build this foundational relationship in assessing and developing will be able to, with deep conviction, deploy their missionaries to the field for faithful service.

### **Prayer – On-Field Care**

Prayer is often seen as a means to the work of missions, rather than the work itself. Missionaries want to know that their sending and supporting churches are praying for them and appreciate them. Often, the church tends to pray after a struggle has begun rather than pray before, during, and after a missionary's time of service. Prayer, though, must be a tool the church wields continually.

Praying for missionaries not only provides individual care but also builds communal bonds across the life of the church. Finding ways to include prayer for the nations across the church's various ministries helps build awareness and increase advocacy for missionaries. Whether it is by praying for missionaries in the service, highlighting them through weekly newsletters, including them in a member directory, or having them share with the church when stateside, thinking strategically about prayer for sent ones is crucial.

### **Advocacy Teams – On-Field Care**

One practical and purposeful way to build member care into the life of the church is through advocacy teams. Advocacy care teams can include a small group of members (four to six members) assigned to a missionary who have covenanted and committed to ongoing care. Members of these teams get to know their missionaries, their stories, their heart for ministry, and even their successes and disappointments on the field.

I recall an Adult Bible Fellowship class that adopted one of our church's missionary families. This class regularly prayed for that family, corresponded with them, and sent members of that class to serve with them through ministry and missionary care trips. The depth of the partnership grew because the depth and breadth of the relationship grew through real and tangible expressions of support and care.

### **Re-Entry Care – Post-Field Care**

Post-field care can be the most challenging care for churches to provide. Missionaries come home for numerous reasons—scheduled visits, life events, abrupt endings, or retirements—and just as the church needs to be the launching pad for its missionaries, it also needs to be the place to which its missionaries can safely and confidently return.

Churches should be for their missionaries a safe place for openness, honesty, and transparency as they plan towards this re-entry phase. Planning begins

by acknowledging that no one-size-fits-all approach to reentry care exists and that providing appropriate care will require considering variables such as a missionary's length of time on the field, unique needs, and attitudes. Our church put together a process by which we knew six months to a year ahead of time when the missionary would be returning stateside. Because we had a mission house at our disposal, we were able to plan for meeting tangible needs through the house and the amenities it included, as well as helping with schooling and transportation needs.

Churches must not only plan with their missionaries for this post-field season, but also be present as missionaries return home. Just as Paul and Barnabas spent “no little time” with the church at Antioch after returning from their first missionary journey, missionaries need to have significant opportunities to interface with their sending church (Acts 14:27). This time of interaction as missionaries share stories, successes, difficulties, and challenges is known as *debriefing*—a time that allows the missionary to share burdens of missionary life with others who provide a listening ear.

As churches and partners plan for post-field care and make themselves present for debriefing, the third area in which the church can assist with reintegration is providing on-ramps into the church. Church leaders will need to establish clear avenues and boundaries for ministry as they incorporate their missionaries back into the life of the church, ensuring their missionaries feel valued but not overextended.

All three of the stages of missionary care—pre-field, on-field, and post-field—are essential and tie into one another, in laying forth a wholistic strategy for missionary sending and care. Determine as a church what the right next steps are for developing a strategy to provide such care. Seek out members who have strong relationships with sent ones and a passion to lead in this ministry, then watch the church labor side by side in sending and caring for your missionaries. Care so much for those you send and support that you can join with Paul in saying, “we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thess 2:8). Your sent ones have been called by God to go out from your church to share Christ in another part of the world, and you can help them persevere in declaring, demonstrating, and displaying his gospel as you hold the rope and never let go.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This article is adapted from the book *Holding the Rope: How the Local Church Can Care for Its Sent Ones* which I wrote. Let me encourage you to pick up a copy and use it as a resource within your church to care

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*well for your sent ones. Ryan Martin, Holding the Rope: How the Local Church Can Care for Its Sent Ones (Louisville, KY: The Upstream Collective, 2022).*

# The Importance of Church Connections for the International Mission Board to Thrive

Jeff and Rose Waligora

The Apostle Paul writes to the local church at Philippi of his joyful prayers for them due to his partnership with them. He states in Philippians 1:3-5, “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” Paul’s example of communicating gratitude, encouragement, prayers, and God’s work is a model that the IMB and its missionaries can emulate.

Nehrbass and Dunaetz presented an empirical study on the relationship between the missionary and the church. Using qualitative techniques, their grounded theory study was based on semi-structured interviews with 17 missionaries and church leaders. Their research aim was to understand why missionaries and churches “form, maintain, and dissolve relationships with each other” (2018). After analyzing the data, the most common theme that emerged from the interviews and appeared over 111 times was the importance of “personal connection.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Kenneth Nehrbass and David Dunaetz, “A Multiple Motives Theory of Church and Missionary Relationships,” in *Missiology: An International Review*, 46, no. 4 (2018): 388-406.



The IMB addresses the world's greatest problem—lostness—with a missionary presence to share God's good news of salvation among the lost peoples and places around the world. But, missionaries on their own are not enough. They need to be connected with the prayers, partnership, giving, and sending of other members from our Southern Baptist churches to support their ministries and strategies. The faithful prayers and sacrificial financial support of churches as they develop partnerships with missionaries and their ministries serve to encourage and inspire both the missionary and the local church.

In the past, the IMB's Field Personnel Orientation (or FPO, that all new missionaries attend before being sent out to their missionary field locations) training staff encouraged the new missionaries to connect well with Southern Baptist churches. They were mostly encouraged to develop and deepen relationships with at least 3-5 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches with whom they were in close contact. Missionaries were encouraged to stay in touch on the field through various communication avenues such as e-mail, sending out personal and ministry newsletters, sharing about the needs on the field, and asking for prayer.

Then, when missionaries came home on their Stateside Assignment (STAS, formerly called furlough), one of the main things they were encouraged to do with their church relationships were to visit these churches and deepen their relationship with them. IMB missionaries on Stateside Assignment (STAS) were also guided to speak at Global Impact Conferences (GIC) and other mission conferences hosted at SBC churches across the United States. During their STAS, missionaries were guided to designate a portion of their time on STAS for rest time, personal growth/development time, family time with relatives, and time to re-connect with their churches.

However, IMB missionaries were not obligated or required to visit a certain number of SBC churches while on their STAS. In addition, no one kept them accountable to find out if they were connecting while they were home on STAS. They were just encouraged to do these things. Therefore, the IMB estimated that "almost 50% of the 47,000 SBC churches had no known connection to an IMB missionary."<sup>2</sup> Missionaries were connecting with only the churches they were sent from in addition to a few others that they had contact with.

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2 Caroline Anderson, "IMB Introduces Church Connections, May 2021, <https://www.imb.org/2021/05/10/imb-introduces-church-connections/>

When Paul Chitwood became president of the IMB in 2019, he realized the current system of missionaries building relationships with SBC churches was not enough. IMB's new president had formerly served as an IMB trustee and as State Executive Director for the Kentucky Baptist State Convention. Chitwood stated regarding many SBC churches not having a relationship at all with IMB missionaries, "We don't have a resource problem; we have a relationship problem." Furthermore, the reality at the end of 2019 was we had 47,000 SBC churches with about 3600 IMB field missionary personnel. Only 54% of these SBC churches were financially supporting the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO).<sup>3</sup>

Chitwood implemented a new set of goals for the organization titled "2025 Strategic Objectives." Two of these objectives related to the IMB and IMB missionaries working closer with SBC churches. The first of these was "To mobilize 75% of our SBC churches to prayerfully and financially support the LMCO." The second objective was "To increase LMCO receipts 6% annually."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, to implement these strategic initiatives, a new church connection paradigm for IMB active missionaries to connect and engage with all of the SBC churches began in 2020. The IMB Core Leadership Team, working in conjunction with each Affinity Group Leader around the world, decided to send one IMB career couple per each affinity group to the IMB headquarters office in Richmond, VA to serve a 3-year MAG (Missionary Assigned Globally) term. This position was called the Affinity Stateside Associate (ASA). The main task of each affinity's ASA was to work with their affinity leadership team and the missionaries within their affinity to help them connect on a quarterly basis with a portfolio of SBC churches they had been assigned based on their STAS zip code.

In addition, with the beginning of the IMB's Church Connections Initiative, Field Personnel Orientation (FPO) training staff collaborated with the ASAs to present and equip new missionaries to connect well with Southern Baptist churches. The goal of the IMB Church Connections Initiative is for each SBC church to have a relationship with an active IMB missionary unit (either a single missionary unit or a missionary unit that is a couple) that helps them to grow in their understanding of missions and hear firsthand stories of how

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<sup>3</sup> IMB Staff Writer, "Southern Baptist Churches needed to fulfill IMB's 2025 Targets, August 2021, <https://www.imb.org/2021/08/25/southern-baptist-churches-needed-fulfill-imbs-2025-targets/>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

God is working around the world. Churches also learn how to deepen their involvement in missions and become closer partners with the IMB.

Initially, this was begun as a pilot project for one year. This pilot project was officially launched in August of 2020. Ten percent of the active IMB missionaries on the field were asked if they would be willing to participate and assigned a portfolio of SBC churches. They were to reach out and connect each quarter with each of the churches in their portfolio. Missionaries recorded their engagements to allow the ASAs and the IMB Data Team to know how each missionary on the field was doing each quarter with their connection/engagement activity with their portfolios. After the pilot, the church connections initiative was then rolled out in two additional phases for all of our 3600 IMB active missionaries around the world.

In mid-2021, the second phase included all IMB missionary field leadership. At first all long-term (career) missionaries were assigned 20 SBC churches based on their STAS zip code, and they could add other SBC churches to their portfolio such as those churches that were their home church, sending churches, praying churches, and partnering churches. The third and final phase was launched in late-2021 to include all remaining active IMB missionary personnel.

Most long-term missionaries have on average around 25 SBC churches in their portfolios. Mid-term (Journeyman, ISC, Masters, Macedonia) missionaries were initially assigned 10 SBC churches based on their zip code, and they too added other churches as well. Most Mid-term missionaries have on average around 10-15 SBC churches in their portfolios to connect with each quarter. In early 2023, the number of assigned churches to all new long-term and mid-term missionaries was increased. Long-term missionaries are now assigned 25 SBC churches, and Mid-term missionaries are assigned 15 churches. This increase came about because of the realization that there were still thousands of churches without a missionary assigned to them.

The church connection task for missionaries is to reach out and connect with all of the SBC churches in their portfolio at least once per quarter, and to record this connection/engagement every quarter. The IMB data team gives the ASAs the stats on how everyone in each affinity is doing with their connections tasks. This initiative helps missionaries keep track of their progress in connecting with all of their SBC churches on a regular basis. Another way to hold missionaries accountable to connecting well was for each IMB

missionary to have a Guide goal that their supervisor could assist them with reaching each quarter. The ASAs also work closely with each of their Affinity Group Leadership Teams (AGLT) to coach them to encourage their affinities and clusters to connect well.

After three years, most of the affinities are seeing progress in terms of their missionaries engaging with SBC churches, but there are still some slow adapters who are learning and adjusting to connect with the churches in their portfolio each quarter. One challenge that many of the missionaries face is that they reach out and connect via email or telephone call efforts with the SBC churches in their portfolio, but do not hear a response from the churches. This may be due to a number of possible factors such as someone not answering church emails or the telephone, or email addresses that are unknown being filtered out into junk mail boxes. Or it may be the case that pastors and churches do receive the emails, but are busy and too overwhelmed to make a personal reply. This could cause the missionaries to wonder if the church contact data is current and correct, or if the church has closed down since they are not receiving any response to their connections efforts. Communication and building a relationship takes time and trust.

It is important for the missionaries to continue to reach out, even if they do not receive a response from their churches, with the hope that eventually they will hear a response in the future. We also greatly encourage our SBC churches that if they receive an email or letter or postcard from IMB missionaries, that someone from the church would take the initiative to respond and help build a relationship with our IMB missionaries. This will help SBC churches to come alongside the IMB in the areas of praying, giving, going, and sending.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome about the importance of the local church and the missionary mutually encouraging one another. He states in Romans 1:8-12, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.”

The IMB's Church Connections Initiative that began three years ago will continue moving forward. The hope is that this program will allow the missionaries and SBC churches to develop a thriving relationship with one another that is mutually encouraging to the church and to the missionary, resulting in even greater kingdom impact in addressing the greatest problem in the world of lostness.

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*Jeff and Rose Waligora have served with the International Mission Board (IMB) since 1997. Jeff has a MA degree in Bible/Theology and Church History from the Wheaton College Graduate School, and Rose also completed her MA degree there in Missions/Intercultural Studies with TESL/TEFL emphasis. They both earned PhDs in Intercultural Studies/Missions from Biola University. They served amongst unreached people groups as strategy coordinators for evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and leadership development. They also supervised mission personnel and teams across the Asia Pacific Rim, and have experience in training, networking, and mobilization. Jeff and Rose have three adult children who grew up in Asia. Presently Jeff & Rose are on assignment at the IMB main headquarters office to coach and mentor mission personnel as they network and mobilize churches to help reach the lost peoples and places of the Asia Pacific Rim.*

# **Intercessory Prayer and the Missionary's Stewardship**

## **Bearing fruit that remains and inviting the Church into the harvest**

April Bunn

### **Abiding in Christ**

In the 1990s, a popular phrase, “What would Jesus do?” (W.W.J.D?), swept through Christian culture in the United States. There were W.W.J.D. bracelets that served as a visual reminder to ask yourself what Jesus might do in your situation. Christians may no longer wear the W.W.J.D. bracelets, but we do look to Scripture to glean “what would Jesus do” as we seek to live in ways that honor the Lord.

As we read God's Word, we see Jesus model a life dependent on the Father. One of the things Jesus consistently did was spend time in prayer. As we seek to walk daily with God, we cannot neglect that Jesus modeled an abiding relationship with His Father. In addition to the encouragement from Christ's life, we have His command in John 15:4 to abide in him. John 15 goes on to teach that we abide in Christ through spending time in the Word and in prayer.

“Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b ESV) is a passage that should bring holy fear to all Christ-followers, especially those who leave their homes to serve as missionaries. As someone who served as a missionary with the International Mission Board for over two decades, I know that no missionary wants to move to a new culture, learn a new language, and leave family and friends to do... nothing. Bear no fruit. Make no difference. See no lives changed. Waste money and time and throw away your life for... nothing.

God offers us fruit and fruit that remains (John 15:16). He says that we can come to Him in prayer, that He hears and answers us, and that this brings Him glory (John 15:7-8). Gerald Borchert in his commentary on John 12-21 emphasizes that, “bearing fruit therefore means loving others as God loves them and giving witness to the world. Such fruit-bearing is possible only by abiding in Jesus, the vine.”<sup>1</sup> This is the desire of the missionary heart—to see fruit that endures. Missionaries desire to see evidence of God at work and that their lives are spent for fruit that lasts.

If prayer is essential to bearing fruit, then prayer is essential to the missionary task. In their book, *Exalting Jesus in John*, Carter and Wredberg suggest that, “where there is prayer, there will be answers. God listens to his people... As the Word shapes our desires and the Spirit forms us from the inside out, we will begin to pray for those things that God cares about. God will hear and answer those prayers.”<sup>2</sup> The *Foundations* document emphasizes prayer as a core conviction in missionary sending and church planting efforts, stating that bold and expectant prayer is needed because God is the one who brings about this abundant fruit we so desire to see.<sup>3</sup>

Carter and Wredberg remind readers that “when we pray expecting him to answer, he will. Confident prayer in the name of Jesus- according to his will- will be answered, and when that answer comes, God will be glorified.”<sup>4</sup> Missionaries desire to see God glorified among the people and places to whom they are called. Thus, the missionary must pray and invite others to do the

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1 Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21, New American Commentary 25b* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 146.

2 Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, *Exalting Jesus in John, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2017), 307.

3 International Mission Board, *Foundations, v. 4* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2022), 61.

4 Carter and Wredberg, *Exalting Jesus in John*, 295.

same. They must persevere in prayer, seeking God's glory among every nation and all peoples, tribes, and languages.

## Intercessory Prayer

Intercessory prayer is an essential component of abiding in Christ. As such, it is not an ineffectual discipline to check off a list but an invitation to cry out to our Father, the Almighty God, to work in and through His Church and to draw the lost to Himself. His plan is that His glory would spread to every nation, tribe, people, and language.

Billions of people worship someone or something other than the One who is truly worthy of worship and praise. God desires that these great multitudes turn in repentance, believe in the one true God, and receive everlasting life. In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, David Wells states, "Petitionary prayer, therefore, is the expression of the hope that life as we meet it, on the one hand, can be otherwise and, on the other hand, that it ought to be otherwise. It is therefore impossible to seek to live in God's world on his term, doing his work in a way that is consistent with who he is, without engaging in regular prayer."<sup>5</sup>

God's Word teaches us to pray with perseverance and persistence, as in the example of the persistent widow in Luke 18. We see Jesus as an intercessor in Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34. We see the Holy Spirit as an intercessor in Romans 8:26-27. We see amazing examples of God working through the fervent intercession of His people throughout the Bible, including the examples of Moses in Exodus 32:11-14, 30-32, and Paul in Romans 9:1-4. Spiritual revival and gospel advance are precipitated by the fervent prayers of God's people.

The missionary must remember that God is the One who draws people to Himself (John 6:44). Apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5; Ps 103:14). God's Spirit works powerfully in us, His Church (Acts 1:8; Gal 5:22-23). He calls us to go to the ends of the earth and to proclaim the good news (Matt 28:18-20).

We cannot bear fruit without remaining in Him through prayer and meditation on His Word (John 15:1-8; Ps 1:1-3). He tells us to ask Him for laborers for His harvest field (Matt 9:37-38). We know that, through abiding in Him,

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5 David Wells, "Prayer: Rebelling against the Status Quo," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Third Edition, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 143.



we will have joy, and we will have answers to our petitions (John 15:11,7, 16:24; Gal 6:9). By studying God's Word, we discover His heart and mind, and through prayer, we apply that knowledge as we seek His leadership and empowerment for joining in His work (Isa 30:21, 42:9; Jer 33:3, Amos 3:7; John 16:13).

We also realize we are in a spiritual battle and that spiritual breakthroughs and advances come in response to our believing prayer (Dan 10:12-13; Eph 6:10-20). God is pursuing all peoples. This effort is met with an intense spiritual battle against a real foe who is highly organized, powerful, and unrelenting in his attempts to keep God's purpose, the salvation of souls, from prevailing. This battle does not belong only to the missionary on the front lines of lostness. This is the battle for the Church, which must unite through intercessory prayer.

## **Personal Testimony**

Dependence on God to bring fruit is clearly laid out in the Bible, but it is a truth that I had not fully grasped until living overseas as a missionary. Seven years into our serving in South Asia, God called our family to write a weekly update in addition to our 3-4 times a-year newsletter. We were discouraged over the years by the lack of communication from our family, friends, and church partners in the States. But, in obedience to what we believed the Lord was asking us to do, we wrote our newsletter list of over 300 people and asked who would be willing to partner with us weekly in prayer. Only ten people replied.

We began writing weekly praises, prayer requests, and a kids' corner with stories of our kids' lives and ways to pray for them. I did not even know what to write each week at first. We shared transparently from our lives and work, and we saw God answer prayers we had been praying for years as just ten more people prayed with us in strategic and informed ways.

We had been asking God for national partners, and as people prayed together with us, God brought a family who had converted to Christianity from Islam and wanted to work with us. He also led us to a local pastor who led his church to partner with us in ministry. We had been asking God to call out more laborers from the United States, and as people prayed together with us, God brought two young ladies who spent the next two years working alongside us in a new area of the city. Through this experience, God opened our

eyes to the fact that strategic and informed prayer is a way every believer can take part in reaching every nation.

God has continued teaching us this over the years and has grown our intercessory network and stewardship. In my current role as director of the International Mission Board's Prayer Office, I have the privilege of seeing a glimpse of global lostness, gospel advance, the Church, and the worldwide efforts of our Southern Baptist missionaries. I am blessed to work alongside co-laborers to encourage and equip Southern Baptists and the global Church to labor together in intercessory prayer. God continues to remind me of the stewardship missionaries have to invite the Church to come together to see every nation and all tribes, peoples, and languages before the throne.

God brought that lesson home to me in a personal way on one of our stateside assignments. Nine years after we began weekly praise and prayer communication, our family had our first stateside assignment in the small town where I grew up. A small country church down the hill from my childhood home prepared their parsonage for us. God planted us at this tiny church where I used to attend community worship services and Vacation Bible Schools and sing "specials" on occasion. My childhood piano teacher is still the pianist. The men and women who taught me in VBS are still there. The members of the other country churches in the area told me stories of how they remembered teaching me, remembered me standing on a pew learning to sing along with the hymns, and remembered my family at revival services. Many were there when I chose to follow Christ, and they witnessed my baptism. Many joined us at our wedding.

These faithful brothers and sisters prayed with us and for us for years. They had prayed by name for our neighbors, friends, church family, and the people of South Asia. They hung on to our every word as we shared about South Asia. They cried at the lostness we shared with them and rejoiced at the stories of redemption.

God showed us clearly by planting us in my hometown that I am one of that family. I am an extension of this family, giving a relatable voice to God's work among the nations as these brothers and sisters walk alongside us in prayer. What I thought was "my story" is not just my story; it is their story, too, because they have been an intimate part of the work in South Asia.

Many of these people have prayed for the nations for years. Maybe they even prayed for the nations we lived among even before God called the girl on the

hill to plant her life there. They pray now in strategic and informed ways because we invited them into places and people's lives they would likely never have known otherwise. This story of God's work among the nations does not belong only to missionaries. It belongs to the Church.

Missionaries must share the burden of lostness so others can carry it alongside them. They need to spur on the Church to "continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." (Col 4:2 ESV) Missionaries mobilize the Church to pray steadfastly by giving them the opportunity to do so in informed and strategic ways. They encourage them to be watchful by reporting where prayer is still needed or where God has answered prayer. They can do so with thankful hearts, knowing He hears the prayers of His people and is working for His glory.

## **Exhortation to Missionaries**

I plead for missionaries to be worthy of imitation in their dependence on the Lord to do the work before you. Humbly preface your labors with prayer and seek to be reminded daily that the missionary task is essentially God's work and will be accomplished only in His strength. Join other believers and pray for God's glory and mercy to be displayed as His Spirit moves to bring a multitude from every nation and all tribes, peoples, and languages to know and worship our Lord Jesus Christ.

I encourage missionaries to exhort and equip the global Church to labor together in prayer. Missionaries witness the devastating lostness among unreached peoples and places throughout the world, but they also see lives transformed by the power of the gospel—a momentous change from darkness to light.

God will work in the hearts of His people as they pray and call them to greater and greater dependence and faithfulness as they abide in Him. He will call people to Himself, call them to give, go, and send. One of the purposes of prayer is to align our will with the will of God (Matt 6:9-10; John 10:3-5). Millions of people, in alignment with God's will for their lives, could change the world as He works through them as a means to accomplishing His purposes. Missionaries have the opportunity and stewardship to model dependence on God. They can point to God as the hero of this great pursuit of all peoples.

The Great Commission is beyond our ability to complete by ourselves. The Triune God works to bring about the vision of Revelation 7:9—a vast multi-

tude from all nations, every tribe, people, and language To the missionary, I say, "Abide." Abide deeply in the Word and prayer. Invite others along on this journey with you. Allow others to pray with you for the lost, for the gospel to advance, and for you to be faithful and fruitful. Pray alongside them for the global Church as well as individual churches in your location and theirs.

God is worthy of your worship. He is worthy of all worship. He will accomplish the work He has begun: the calling of people from every nation, all peoples, tribes, and languages.

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# The Stewardship of Prayer in the Fulfilling of the Great Commission

Reed Ellis

## Introduction

Before moving overseas, I was asked (rightly) by my candidate consultant about my personal Bible study and prayer life. She wanted to be sure I had a good foundation before walking through the challenge of setting up life in a new environment. These “boxes” of accountability were easy for me to check off, as I was a disciplined 25-year-old.

Every day, I got up early, “did” my quiet time and then moved on with my day – often forgetting about the things I had prayed for in my quiet time. I had been taught that daily time in prayer and the Word was essential to growth, and I made this a priority. This was a good habit to form early in my faith walk, and I am thankful for the patterns of faithfulness and discipline He was developing in me. But I had so much to learn about what it was to walk with, *to abide in*, Christ. In God’s providence, He chose to use these times I had set aside to read the Word and pray, the vulnerability of living in a new culture, and the patience of local sisters to deepen my understanding of what it meant to walk with Him.

## Unexpected Lessons on Prayer

We learned everything about what it was to be an adult in a context different from our home culture. Going straight from college to seminary and then moving overseas, my husband and I had always been students in America. We bought our first washing machine, our first car, and our first oven in another country. We learned how to navigate banks, public transport, utility companies, hospitals, church politics, and the changes that come with parenthood in our new environment. The newness and challenges of my physical surroundings were just a foretaste of the deeper lessons I had in front of me.

Through His Word, my own experiences, and the lives of local sisters, the Lord taught me that time with Him is not something “to do” but something to *have* and to *enjoy*. While setting aside this time was important and allowed me to grow in many ways, I often placed too much focus on the discipline and too little on the One who wanted to teach me. As I walked with Muslim background sisters living in difficult familial and socio-economic circumstances, I learned that they often did not have a quiet house, a nice couch, and a hot cup of coffee made by a loving husband to surround their daily time with the Lord. Instead, they learned the Word, bit by bit, in weekly meetings and meditated on what they had learned throughout the week. As they focused on small bits of Scripture, it transformed their view of the world, their faith, and how they viewed prayer in the work of the Great Commission. Time with God was an *integral part* of their lives, something they *depended on*, regardless of the surrounding circumstances.

One local sister was especially instrumental in teaching me to abide. After months of trying to find a way to share the gospel with a friend who talked way too much, I asked this sister for advice on what to do. God used her simple answer to teach me a great deal about the relationship between prayer and how He works in fulfilling the Great Commission. My believing friend told me I needed to pray for God to close the mouth of my unbelieving friend so that I could share the truth with her. It was that simple. I prayed, and God almost literally closed my friend’s mouth and opened the door for the gospel. And my understanding of the role of prayer in the work I was doing began to shift.

Through this lesson, He began to develop in me a passion for giving things to Him in prayer and trusting Him for the results because of the work of

Christ on my behalf (Heb 4:9-10, 4:14-16). He began to show me that my efforts “to do” my time with Him every day often had more in common with the religious practices of those around me than I had ever imagined. In my well-meaning discipline, I had sometimes missed the gift of truly resting in Him. Our omnipresent God goes with us wherever we go, so why would we ever want to lean on our own self-sufficiency after “doing” our time with Him in the morning (Matt 28:20)? When we enter His presence in prayer, He gives us the opportunity to lay our burdens at His feet and trust that He is at work – always for His own glory and for our good (1 Peter 5:7).

Many days, after dropping the kids off at school, I drove across our city to visit with friends so I could share more of the hope of Christ with them. And as I drove, I often prayed, “God, I have nothing to offer You today. I cannot do this. I am tired. I do not know how I can teach anyone anything about You today. I need You to show up. Because I just cannot do this on my own.” And that’s exactly when God showed up – in my weakness. The days I surrendered everything to Him, even my own efforts, are the days my friends were most attracted to the gospel. That should not be surprising because it is what the Bible teaches, and I had read it many times (2 Cor 12:9-10). But, I needed my Good Shepherd to continue patiently teaching me.

In my moments of desperation, I learned a simple truth in a new and refreshing way: *because of the work of Christ, I can rest in Him*. The author of Hebrews tells us that, when we trust in Jesus, we enter true and lasting rest from our works (e.g., 4:10). Jesus, our Great High Priest, is Himself our rest, and He can sympathize with all our weaknesses. Because of this, we can go with confidence to the throne of grace, and He will help us (e.g., 4:14-16).

This truth shook my understanding of the role of prayer in the work of the Great Commission: because of the finished work of Christ, I can approach God’s throne with confidence. It changed the way I saw my own time with the Lord, and the boundaries of when, where, and about which things I prayed began to disappear. I found myself depending on Him more for the small things of life and giving Him thanks for each provision.

When it came to the monumental task ahead of us as cross-cultural workers, I found myself leaning into the biblical promises that He would go with me and that He was the only One able to bring any fruit from my labors (Matt 28:20; 1 Cor 3:6-7). As I prayerfully submitted these things to Him, I learned what real rest truly is; and this gave me more energy for the task ahead be-

cause I understood that our work was supported by the power and authority of the God who was able to raise the dead. In my prayers, He got the glory. In this rest, I began to see prayer less as a simple command to be obeyed and more as a stewardship to be enjoyed.

## **Prayer as a Gift for the Christian Believer**

While other faith traditions often understand prayer as something that is memorized, repeated, and “done” out of duty, for Jesus-followers, prayer is a gift and a holy responsibility that has been given to the priesthood of believers spread across the earth. It is never something merely to be “done” or checked off a “to-do” list. It is an opportunity to approach the God of the universe who has brought wayward sheep into His fold, to honor Him with praises, to cast our burdens on Him, and to trust Him with the future. Jon Bloom, in his devotional passage on Matt 7:7-11, comments, “God does not want us to relate to him as a mere subject relates to a king, or as a mere sheep relates to its shepherd. Fundamentally, he wants us to relate to him as a child relates to a loving, generous father who loves to give good gifts when his children ask him.”<sup>1</sup> He is, indeed, our generous Father, and this should shape the way we view prayer.

He has given us His Word and has shown us how to pray based on its precepts. His Word teaches that He is an approachable God who hears and responds to the prayers of His people (Heb 4:16, 1 Pet 3:12, 1 John 5:14-15). He wants believers to align their hearts with His, pray in faith and according to His Word, and know that He hears them as they trust in Him as their Good Father (Matt 7:11).

Though God wants us to depend on Him, human nature is to seek self-sufficiency and self-glory. Jesus understood the human struggle to “perform” prayers rather than offer them simply to the God who hears. He told His followers to pray simply and in private – in an intimate place where only their Father would see them because, He told them, there was no need to use excess words in their prayers. Their Father already knew all their needs (Matt 6:5-8).

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Bloom, “We Call Him ‘Father,’ The Privilege of Christian Prayer,” *desiringGod*, 1 January 2023, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-call-him-father>.



Our Good Father has seen us in our weakest and most vulnerable moments, yet He wants us to approach Him in prayer for ourselves and for others. In fact, He chooses to use our prayers as part of His plan to bring about His will. He could accomplish anything He wanted without our prayers, but He has gifted us with the opportunity to be part of His work. He is honored when we go to Him in dependence and ask Him to do what only He can accomplish.

## **Old Testament Precedent for Prayer**

This opportunity and ability to go to God on behalf of others is a special gift to Christian believers, but as with all of Jesus' teachings, the groundwork is found in the Old Testament.

Everything Jesus taught was rooted in what the Israelites had been given centuries before. When the Jews sought to kill Him because He claimed to be God's Son, He told them that, if they had believed Moses, they would have believed Him (John 5:18, 45-47). There is one God, and He has always been the same – before and after Jesus' incarnation (John 1:1; Eph 4:6, Col 1:16-17, 1 Tim 2:5). God's character is constant and His desire for people to trust solely in Him for all good things has never changed.

Examples of intercessory prayer are prevalent not only in the New Testament but also in the Old Testament. Abraham, knowing the character of God and out of concern for Lot, interceded on behalf of the people of Sodom (Gen 18:22-33). Moses asked God to show His mercy to the Israelites (Exod 32:11-14; 30-32). As they continued in disobedience, he prayed that God would forgive the Israelites for the glory of His name among the nations (Num 14:10-20). Solomon prayed on behalf of the Gentiles who sought God. He asked God to hear their prayer for the glory of His name so that all people on the earth might know Him (2 Chr 6:32-33). Daniel prayed on behalf of the Israelites, appealing to the character of God, His covenant, and His steadfast love (Dan 9:4, 9, 16-19). While examples of intercessory prayer, rooted in an appeal to the character of God, are found throughout the Old Testament, we also see the promise of a coming priest who will rule and reign forever (1 Sam 2:35, Ps 110:4).

## **New Testament Example - Our Great High Priest and the Two Greatest Commands**

The author of Hebrews asserts that this promised One is the Perfect High Priest, who will live forever to intercede for His people (e.g., 7:23-25). Jesus' qualification as the Great High Priest came through His fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:17, Heb 14:15). Though He never strayed from the Law, He summed up the Law with two commandments: love God, and love others (Matt 22:36-40). Loving others was demonstrated by a "new" command: that His followers should love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34-35). And, to love Him is to obey Him (John 14:15).

Jesus taught His disciples to pray for His kingdom to come (Matt 6:10). The kingdom of God is His reign over the people He has redeemed. This prayer for God's kingdom to come is a prayer filled with sacrifice and love. Jesus' disciples follow His example as they are God's instruments in proclaiming the good news so others might be brought into this kingdom. The prayer that His kingdom come is simultaneously a prayer of supplication for the salvation of lost people and a prayer of commitment on the part of the believer because Jesus-followers are the primary means for the spread of the gospel.

The High Priestly Prayer in John 17 demonstrates the love of Christ both for His Father and for His followers as we see His sacrificial, gospel-centered prayer for the sanctification and protection of His followers (present and future), to the glory of the Father. He offered these prayers knowing that the only way they would come to pass was His walking through the betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion we read about in the following chapters.

Intercessory prayer is an act of obedience and trust in God, but it is also an act of love and sacrifice toward other people, including our enemies (Luke 6:28). Prayer for others is a simple act of love – toward them and toward God as we obey His command. Jesus told his disciples that, in showing this love to others, they were imitating the Father (Luke 6:35-36). In the work of the Great Commission, prayers for the salvation of others are a sacrifice of time *and* a commitment to be a part of sharing the good news of our Great High Priest with them in a way they can understand. In the words of Susan Laf-

ferty, “[Prayer] puts words to our submission. And reveals our dependence on the Lord as we take in His Word and live out His Truth.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Prayer and the Priesthood of Believers**

While Jesus is the Great High Priest, His followers are a “royal priesthood” called by God so they might proclaim His glory to others (1 Pet 2:9). The royal priesthood of the New Testament believer means that we can approach God directly, but it also reminds us of the Old Testament priests who represented man before God. Because the way between God and man has now been opened, Jesus-followers are able and responsible to carry the needs of others before the Father. Jesus-followers do not have to depend on another person (priest) to approach God. Instead, they can directly approach His throne and intercede on behalf of those in need.

W.A. Criswell says, “Intercession must not be limited to prayers of concern for the salvation of the unredeemed. The believer-priest has the *responsibility* to pray for ‘all saints’ (Eph 6:18), ‘for all that are in authority’ (1 Tim 2:2), for those who are sick (Jas 5:16), and, indeed, ‘for all men’ (1 Tim 2:1).”<sup>3</sup> In other words, Christians carry the responsibility of interceding both for the salvation of the lost and for the well-being of those in the church. Again, Criswell says, “If the believer-priest is to rightly assume the responsibility of the New Testament priesthood, he must with a holy intensity become concerned for others. Anything else or anything less is to prostitute the office of the priesthood.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to quote Samuel’s view that his ceasing to pray for others would have been a sin against the Lord (1 Sam 12:23).<sup>5</sup> The priesthood of the believer gives us access to God in a way that was not possible before, but this access brings with it a stewardship of prayer on behalf of others.

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2 Susan Lafferty, “Spiritual Formation: Essential Disciplines,” *Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions*, Vol. 3 No. 1, Spring 2024, <https://serials.atla.com/gcbjm/article/view/3449/4639>.

3 J. Gerald Harris, *Pardoned to be Priests* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 145.

4 J. Gerald Harris, *Pardoned to be Priests* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 145.

5 J. Gerald Harris, *Pardoned to be Priests* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 145.

## **Jesus' Example of Prayer as Love, Sacrifice, and an Instrument in Fulfilling the Great Commission**

When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He responded with an example that showed the honor of God's name and the coming of His kingdom as the basis upon which other petitions should be made (Luke 11:1-14). Later in Luke, we read that He came "to seek and save the lost" (e.g., Luke 19:10). John tells us that He told His followers to ask for anything in His name and He would grant it (e.g., 14:14). When we look at Jesus' model prayer and understand the purpose for which He came, this promise in John comes with a special understanding of the stewardship of prayer for the Jesus-follower.

As Jesus demonstrated in the 40-day fast at the beginning of His ministry, all power would come from God alone (Acts 1:8). His disciples intercede, but He is One who answers – so that the Father might be glorified in the Son (John 14:13). Accordingly, when His disciples lacked the ability to drive a demon out of a boy, Jesus told them that "this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer" (Mark 9:29).

When He taught His disciples to pray, He told them to not be like the hypocrites, looking to be seen by others but to pray to the Father and to seek His reward only (Matt 6:5-6). The Gentiles, He said, used many words and empty phrases because they wanted to be heard, but He told them not to be like this because their Father knew their needs before they even asked (Matthew 6:7-8). In His lovingkindness, He gave them an example of what prayer should look like. In a short, easy-to-memorize example, He taught them to pray for the honor of God's name, the coming of His kingdom, His will to be accomplished, their daily sustenance, forgiving hearts, and protection from temptation (Matthew 6:9-14). Commenting on its simplicity and depth, Al Mohler said, "The Lord's Prayer takes less than twenty seconds to read aloud, but it takes a lifetime to learn."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus not only gave them a perfect framework for prayer in His model prayer, but He also left His followers with a more intimate view of His own prayer for them in the High Priestly Prayer. In John 17, He bore His heart to the Father as He interceded on behalf of those who followed Him in that day and for those who would follow Him in the future. The Messiah not only knew

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<sup>6</sup> R. Albert Mohler, *The Prayer that Turns the World Upside Down: The Lord's Prayer as a Manifesto for Revolution* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2018), xvii.

His people before they were conceived, but He knew them fully, in all their sin and rebellion, and chose to pray for their salvation and for the unity of the Church (John 17:20-21).

At the end of His life, knowing that He would be betrayed and denied by people in His inner circle and that those with Him during a time of inner turmoil did not grasp the gravity of the situation, Jesus prayed. Filled with anguish about the suffering and death He knew were coming and knowing that His death and resurrection were necessary for His followers to have eternal life, He prayed to His Father that there might be another way (Matthew 26:30-27:2, 27:11-56, Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 12:2). As Jesus prayed, He demonstrated His love for God and His love for others. He prayed for His Father's will to be done because He knew that drinking of this bitter cup was the only way the people He loved could be saved and the Father He loved would be glorified (Matt 26:36-46). He did this because His heart and prayers were centered on the prayer He taught His disciples – that God's will be done and His kingdom come on earth as in heaven.

## **Prayer in the Early Church**

Following Jesus' example, the early church also knew prayer was an essential part of loving God, loving others, and seeking to see the kingdom of God advance across the earth. The apostles prayed for God to provide the right replacement for Judas (Acts 1:23-26). After the promised Holy Spirit came, the people of God "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). God used this example of abiding in the Vine to inspire awe in onlookers and bring new people every day into the coming kingdom (Acts 2:47).

Peter's prayer for Dorcas and her subsequent healing resulted in the spreading of the fame of the Lord and many people coming to follow Him (Acts 9:40-42). Through Cornelius' prayer and vision and through his own prayers, Peter was able to interpret the good news that the gospel was also for the Gentiles (Acts 10:5-6, 19-20, 33-34; 11:2-18). And when they heard, they believed (Acts 10:45-48). The church was together and praying as Peter was miraculously released from prison (Acts 12:5-11). While the church at Antioch was praying and fasting, God revealed to them that Barnabas and Saul should be sent out as missionaries (Acts 13:1-3).

The Epistles are also filled with examples of how integral prayer was in the life of the early Church. In Romans, we read that, when we do not know what to pray, the Spirit Himself intercedes on our behalf (Rom 8:26). Paul later tells us that prayer is meant to engage both our intellect *and* our hearts (1 Cor 14:15). He tells the Ephesian church to pray “at all times . . . making supplication for all the saints” (Eph 6:18). We read about believers praying for one another, for their perseverance, for their effectiveness in sharing the gospel, for their spiritual understanding, and for their healing (Col 1:3, 9; 4:3, 1 Thess 3:10, 2 Thess 1:11, Phlm 6, Heb 13:8, Jas 5:14, 16). When Paul argues that the Jews unsuccessfully sought to be made right with God through their own works, he prayed for their salvation, based on the work of Christ alone (Rom 9:30-10:4).

## **Application**

Take a moment, *right now*, to think about what this means for your life and the way you approach the gift and responsibility of prayer. Think about how these truths affect the way you communicate with others about how they can pray for you. Think about how they might affect the value you place on time in intercessory prayer for believers and for the lost. Think about how they might affect your dependence on the Father as the true Hero of our story and the only One who can give fruit.

I would like to simply challenge you to pray. Ask Him to show you your own weakness and dependence on Him. If He reveals something in your life or way of thinking that needs to be confessed, take time to confess your sin and remember the hope of the gospel. Rest there and praise Him for His goodness and grace. Give these things to Him, and trust in His strength. Ask Him to show up in your weakness and do amazing things that show His strength to the watching world.

If you need a few hours or a day (or more) to spend with Him and let Him recalibrate your thinking, set that time aside right now. You will not regret it.

After you have heard from Him, share what He has shown you with someone else – a friend, a spouse, a team leader. Perhaps, He might be teaching you something that will edify others as we work together to see people from every tribe, people, and language come together in this beautiful and royal priesthood of believers spread across the globe.

## **Conclusion**

As Jesus taught us, prayer does not need to be complicated. He is pleased when it is simple and to the point. God uses our prayers in the fulfillment of the Great Commission as He shows up in our weakness, closes the mouths of those who need to hear, opens prison doors, and opens our hearts to those around us who still need to hear the hope of the gospel. As we look to the examples of prayer in the Old and New Testaments, we see that, like God's character, His heart for prayer has never changed. He loves to hear and respond to the prayers of His people because this is a key part of abiding in Him.

As we pray in biblically informed ways for ourselves and others, He teaches and molds us into His likeness, calibrating our hearts to His. And as we align our hearts with His and submit our requests to Him, we see fruit come not by our efforts or strength but from Him, who is the true Vine.

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*Reed Ellis and her family served overseas for 18 years before returning to work in the IMB home office. Reed has an MDiv from SBTS and is planning to begin DMin studies at SEBTS in January. She currently serves as the Prayer Strategy Implementation Manager and works to mobilize and equip IMB supporters to pray in strategic and informed ways. In her spare time, she enjoys playing games with her family, cooking anything gluten free, and having meaningful conversations with friends.*

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# VOICES FROM THE FIELD



# The Church and the Missionary

Karen Pearce

William Carey is called the father of the modern missionary movement. At 33 years of age, he embarked on the greatest journey of his life. Burdened with the “spiritual darkness” of the vast continents, he helped form the Baptist Missionary Society<sup>1</sup> and was appointed its first missionary to India. Before Carey’s departure, fellow Baptist Andrew Fuller asked, “There is a gold mine in India; but it seems as deep as the center of the earth; who will venture to explore it?” “I will go down,” responded William Carey, “but remember that you must hold the rope.”<sup>2</sup>

“Holding the Ropes” has become an apt metaphor for how sending churches support and undergird those sent out as missionaries. The church in Antioch provides a powerful biblical example of holding the rope, as it served as a sending and supporting church for Paul’s missionary journeys (Acts 13:1–3; 14:26; 15:32–33, 36–40; 18:22–23).

IMB missionaries on the field need their sending churches to follow this model—holding the rope with support, prayers, finances, wise counsel, and more. They also need to find a healthy, local church (or help establish one) in their new home to give them a place to connect and flourish in gospel ministry. In both settings, the church is foundational for healthy long-term service.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally known as “The Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen”

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bcarey9.html>

This article explores what those connections look like in real-time with a few of our colleagues on the field. Our missionaries serve in many different roles and contexts, which affects the kind of church they are in and their ministry within and through the church. Samantha Conners\* in Europe serves in a support role. She and her family attend an International church in the city and have been on the field for nine years. Tyrell and Nida Kilkenny\* in Asia work with nationals and speak the local language. Their church is multi-lingual to meet the needs of a diverse population. They are long-termers and have worshipped with this local congregation and been supported in ministry by them for 20 years. Greg and Joanna Hughes\* in the Horn of Africa are first-termers and are working in a high-security area. Though their focus is on reaching their UPG, they meet with other workers in a house church for fellowship and encouragement. Geoff and Jennifer Bowen\* are short-term workers in Asia. They had hoped to connect with the local churches but the language barrier has made it difficult. They attend an international church which has given them an outlet for ministry and worship. These four families shared their experiences with staying connected to church back at home and in their new home.

## **Home Church: Preparation, Support, and Connection**

The IMB has always required church endorsement for service overseas. Most missionaries were part of a healthy church where discipleship and accountability shaped their call. Churches committed to pray for their missionaries.

In the last few years, the International Mission Board (IMB) began initiatives to more closely involve the church and has asked it to play a pivotal role in the preparation and deployment process. In the 7-step process laid out on the IMB website,<sup>3</sup> step number 2 is an 8-10 week assessment of the candidate by the home church to help determine his/her readiness for missionary service. This new initiative has helped churches to take a bigger role in supporting *their* missionary on the field.

Greg and Joanna Hughes are a good example. Their home church helped evaluate and train them in evangelism. The church's DNA was a nations-focused mindset for prayer, giving, short-term trips, and partnerships with several personnel on the field. The Hughes were the first long-term unit sent out spe-

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.imb.org/go/process/>

cifically by their church. This has led to healthy partnership now that they are serving in the Horn of Africa.

“They adopted our people group and have been committed in prayer and short-term trips,” said Joanna. “My biggest encouragement is when individuals reply to our newsletters to ask a question or comment about something specific we shared, or to tell me what they’re praying about specifically, or share something God is doing in their life.”

Samantha Conners’ church has supported them with prayers, care packages, and money raised through VBS for special ministry projects. Recently, the church sent their first short-term team to work with the Conners on the field. Samantha hopes to provide more opportunities for them to partner with them in the future.

Tyrell and Nida Kilkenny in Asia came to the field in 1992. Their pastor was a former IMB missionary. “Bro. Miles Seaborn and his wife Jeannie of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, prepared us by personally talking to us about life on the field, raising a family (we were not yet parents), and prayed over us often,” Nida said. They continue to support in prayer and hosting when the Kilkennys are stateside.

The Kilkenny’s closest church connection is currently with Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth because they have provided a missionary house for them on stateside assignment. Travis Avenue wants to send a team to join in their ministry to an unreached people group in Asia.

Geoff and Jennifer Bowen were on staff at a large church before coming to the field. A high security placement overseas and a change of pastor have made it difficult to stay as connected as they hoped. The Bowens rely more on individual friends and contacts within the church to be their support rather than the church as a whole.

However, the ongoing connections are a two-way street. Prioritizing these relationships has to be an intentional part of the missionary’s ministry as well as a priority of their home church. The Conners send weekly prayer requests and videos several times a year. The Bowens text in real time with their closer contacts. The Hughes talk, via Signal, to members of their church, send monthly newsletters, offer volunteer opportunities, and create special resources and videos for special events. All of the families interviewed spend time in person with their home churches when they are in the states—re-

connecting with their home churches to build relationships, give updates, encourage involvement, and share how God is at work through their joint effort.

### **Church on the Field: fellowship, ministry opportunities, and support**

Church on the mission field can take many shapes and forms depending on the missionary's role, local culture, people group focus, language level, and security needs. The Connors and Bowens are involved in support roles in larger cities where the international population is significant. They are involved in international churches where they use their gifts, disciple others, and find fellowship.

The Kilkennys live in a place where there are several local Baptist churches already planted, and their pastor desires for their church to be a haven for them as they reach out to a people group without any churches.

"However, we feel strongly about being involved in local church ministry," Nida Kilkenny said. "I attend the women's group, we attend special times of preaching, we pray for our staff, and encourage members in missions." This church has been home for 20 years, and their children were baptized there. "It has been a great place to receive spiritual feeding, and a wonderful place to use our gifts to encourage the members," Nida said. "We minister to them through prayer, encouraging local missionaries, discipling new believers, and supporting our pastoral staff."

The Hughes are reaching an unreached people group in the horn of Africa, and they meet for weekly worship in a home group with other missionaries. It is not fully church as there is not yet covenant membership, elders, or ordinances, but they are able to be disciplined and disciple others. "Some of the Europeans in our house group are in the early phases of language learning, and we serve the group by bringing them along on prayer walks, village visits, and evangelism opportunities," Joanna said.

"One way our house group has really ministered to our family is by caring for our 2 young kids. We don't have Sunday School teachers, VBS leaders, or a big network of other Christian families to pour into our kids - so we are really grateful for our house group's support as we seek to parent in a godly way, and the way they model a life of faith to our kids," Joanna said.

These local churches on the field are the catalyst for missionary zeal, prayer support, ministry opportunities, and healthy discipleship. They are “friends of the same faith to get you fired up and excited about reaching the lost.” Jennifer Bowen said.

## **Challenges for Staying Connected**

Whether it is with the home church in the States or with the local church on the field, often the “job” of the missionary makes it difficult to stay in close contact. The Kilkennys and the Bowens both travel a lot as part of their job and it makes consistent worship attendance difficult. The Kilkennys long tenure at their church means that relationships are solidified and their ongoing support for the pastors and other local missionaries is a way they continue to bless their congregation even when they are away. The Bowens being short-term in their location have had to be intentional to get involved whenever, however they can, no matter how sporadic it might be.

Another challenge is security. This is especially true for the Bowens and the Hughes. Living in areas hostile to the Gospel makes it tricky to safely communicate with believers at home and locally about what they are doing. The wrong information in the wrong hands could harm local Christians and jeopardize their ability to stay in the country.

A third challenge is involving SBC churches in ministry on the field. Depending on job focus or security needs, hosting a team might not be as simple as joining alongside the work the missionary is already doing. Field personnel must be flexible and creative in finding ways for their local churches in the states to serve. Many, like Samantha Connors, find ways to involve their church in ministry through their international church or through the local missionary team that can utilize English speakers in outreach events.

Lastly, the biggest challenge is always time. The life of a missionary is busy. Between navigating in a new language and culture, encouraging local believers, evangelizing and fulfilling job responsibilities, there is not a lot of discretionary time, so one needs to be diligent and intentional in order to keep the rope-holders informed and prayerful.

## **Advice for Church Relationships**

Church is not a what, but a who. It’s not a building or a universal idea, but a group of people. One church planter in the Pacific Northwest said it like this:

“The church is the regenerate people of God saved by the power of God for the purposes of God in this world.”<sup>4</sup>

This understanding of church expands exponentially for missionaries serving overseas. They have a people at home sending, praying, “holding the ropes,” and a people in their country of service encouraging, celebrating, and discipling alongside them. Participation in a church body is a must for following Christ and for effective, biblical ministry. Staying connected both at home and abroad is of utmost importance. “You need the church more than you know, so make it a priority,” said Samantha Conners.

The missionaries interviewed for this article offered the following advice for new missionaries as they provide several practical suggestions for relating to sending churches and local churches on the field.

1. Define the relationship that you want to have with your home church before you leave the US and then keep up with your commitments to your US church. (Conners)
2. Find your advocates in your home church, and stay in touch with these people individually. Send family updates, ask about their lives, pray for one another, and be real friends with these people. Church staffs are busy and many causes vie for ministers’ time. Your lay friends who will remember you in prayer will help the church remember you, too. (Hughes)
3. Get a good grasp of what the security situation is where you’re going and figure out how to communicate effectively within those parameters. (Bowen)
4. Don’t wait –get involved quickly and consistently with local believers. (Bowen)
5. Don’t go to your new local church with a “what can I get out of it” attitude. Go looking to encourage and equip local workers or believers. (Kilkennys)

If you are learning a language for your people, get involved in a local language church quickly. It might not be worshipful for you at first, but will be important to learn the language and culture. (Bowen)

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<sup>4</sup> Jeff Vanderstelt, “Who is the church?” interview with *Desiring God*; March 19, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfqsoSJ-Fgk>.

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*\*Names changed for security purposes*

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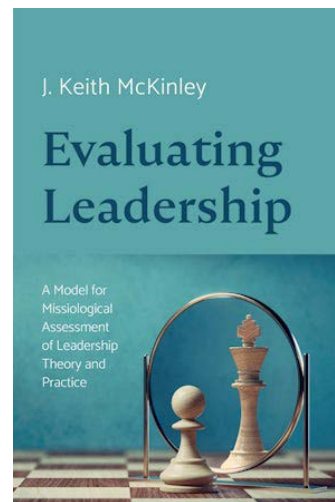
# RESOURCE REVIEWS



**McKinley, J. Keith. *Evaluating Leadership: A Model for Missiological Assessment of Leadership Theory and Practice*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2024.**

**Reviewed by Brian McClure, IMB Personnel, Europe**

Leadership captivates the hearts of millions, yet the path to effective leadership often remains uncertain. Amidst a sea of books, each advocating its own theories and philosophies of leadership, *Evaluating Leadership* by J. Keith McKinley contributes to a missiological leader's toolbox for advancing his or her leadership potential. Growing up in Bangladesh as a missionary kid and former missionary himself, McKinley has a background in missional living coupled with leadership experience that includes both the US Army and IMB. McKinley takes his background and interest in leadership to help serve missional leaders by creating a framework for evaluating a leadership theory for the missional context. Leadership theory is the academic study of how and why certain individuals become leaders.



Bass' theory of leadership has four key components known as the "Four I's:" idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Idealized influence involves a leader's ability to play a charismatic role in demonstrating curiosity and providing feed-

back. Inspirational motivation is how a leader communicates a clear and compelling vision while maintaining an authoritative presence. Intellectual stimulation helps foster an environment of innovation and critical thinking. Lastly, a transformational leader takes into consideration every individual's needs and motivations while supporting and fostering their growth. These elements collectively allow a leader to inspire and develop those they lead.

McKinley's book is divided into four parts, each fulfilling a unique objective. The first part introduces the reader to Bass's leadership theory, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent discussions. The second part delves into the theory's teleological, ontological, authority, and ethical aspects, offering a comprehensive analysis. The third part explores the influence of culture on leadership theory, a crucial aspect often overlooked in other leadership literature. The final part guides the reader in analyzing any leadership theory from a Christian intercultural missions leadership perspective, a unique and valuable approach.

McKinley's research is not just academic; it is deeply rooted in a heart for the nations, a passion that permeates this book. This focus on missionary leadership is a rare find and sets McKinley's work apart. A prime example of this is in chapter eight, where McKinley uses Gene Hofstede's dimensions of culture to provide a baseline for evaluating the cross-cultural compatibility of Bass' theory. Hofstede is widely recognized as an authority on understanding cultural differences across countries. McKinley's incorporation of secular theories into a Christian missional context is a testament to his unique approach.

Many missional leaders seek to adopt practices that work in the context in which they live and plant churches. This desire for effectiveness can sometimes overshadow a holistic view of a theory. McKinley's book, however, excels at helping missionaries evaluate any leadership theory's philosophical construct, theological undergirding, and implications of the cultural influence of origin. This practical approach will empower leaders to employ a leadership theory in a context where the theory was not created or has never been used, enhancing their effectiveness in the field.

Another strength of this book is that McKinley seeks to take insights from disciplines outside of missions and employs these to advance the gospel. McKinley leverages cultural anthropology, psychology, and sociology resources to help missionaries excel in leading other missionaries. He works to

make sense of a world often understudied by most missionaries. One example of this is Bernard Bass' theory of Transformational Leadership. Bass was an American psychologist who developed it from the work of James Burns. Their leadership theories provide a useful framework for many types of leaders, from business to non-profit. Many missionaries look only to the Bible as the source of leadership principles. Yet, McKinley broadens missional leader's pallet of paint by choosing to look at "all truth as God's truth," seemingly inspired by Thomas Aquinas.

The greatest weakness of the book's language is that the specialized language and theoretical content may be a challenge for the missionary who is looking only for practical content. The book would be more accessible and attractive to missionaries if there were a greater display of it being applied and used in field contexts. This limitation can be found in many resources, but leaders will glean a clear path toward the healthy implementation of a leadership theory.

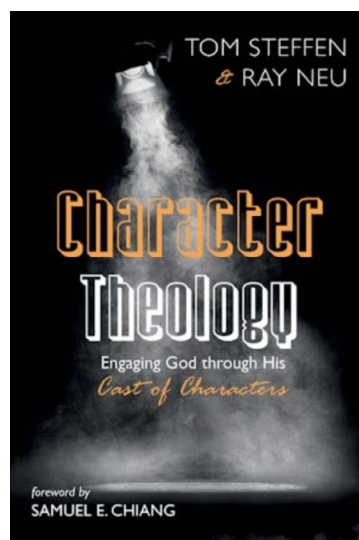
*Evaluating Leadership* is a valuable resource for any Christian leader looking to evaluate which leadership model to deploy in their growth. This book equips any missional leader with a framework and a list of questions to assess and implement a given theory for advancing the gospel through this biblically faithful resource.

**Steffen, Tom & Ray Neu. *Character Theology: Engaging God Through His Cast of Characters*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2024.**

**Reviewed by Cameron D. Armstrong, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim**

What does the oral nature of Scripture mean for Bible interpreters? How can Bible teachers move from a mere explanation of God’s word to an experience of the Grand Storyteller himself? Why might shifting our hermeneutical traditions become necessary in our postmodern world? In *Character Theology*, Tom Steffen and Ray Neu answer these questions by making the case for heart-level engagement with biblical characters to experience the Chief Character, Jesus. Breaking new ground, Tom Steffen, orality scholar and Biola University intercultural studies professor emeritus, teams up with Ray Neu, Spoken Worldwide’s Director of Orality Coaching. This scholar-practitioner duo delivers an argument and template for doing character theology.

Steffen and Neu divide their book into two parts. Part 1 develops several elements that compose character theology, which they define (in chapter 1) in simplest terms as “engaging God through ‘reading’ biblical characters in the context of the story” (10). Such a task calls for understanding the various types of characters (chapter 2) presented in the Bible, including animals, spirits, and “personified entities” like rainstorms (47). In Steffen and Neu’s words, “Bible char-



acters leave behind a trail of breadcrumbs that lead to theology and ethics the Author-author wishes recipients to appropriate” (56). Orality (chapter 3) and oral hermeneutics (chapter 4) are essential in the interpretation task. Steffen and Neu call the omission of orality in biblical narrative interpretation the “big forgot,” meaning theologians forget that the words of Scripture were first transmitted by, for, and through oral societies. Discussing through character-centric questions (chapter 5) how characters change and develop enhances our understanding of God, even as we identify with the characters.

Part 2 of *Character Theology* brings the concepts taught in Part 1 to life. Ray Neu (chapter 6) details the reactions of three “Engaging Bible Characters (EBC)” groups, made up of a Filipino group, an African group, and one in Florida, USA. As Neu facilitated each group through the entire story of Jonah in a 90-minute session, deep transformational responses followed. In Chapter 7, Steffen interviews Neu about these EBC experiences, including how he, as the storyteller, was personally affected. The book concludes with a summative chapter that calls readers to start such EBC groups and drive the conversation forward.

Three noteworthy strengths stood out in *Character Theology*. First, the transparency of the authors in detailing their personal shift from textual hermeneutics to oral hermeneutics that calls for “trekking” (149) into a Bible story with all senses engaged is quite moving. Steffen and Neu are not afraid to say they missed the mark in their early years working among oral peoples. Second, the authors helpfully expand readers’ understandings of what makes up a biblical character, and then model how pinpointing character development leads to not just discovering but also experiencing the Author. Third, this reviewer will not soon forget the challenge to unlearn the gut reaction of Westerners to flattening a biblical narrative into a pithy one-liner proposition. Instead, seekers ought to be free to find unexplored beauty in the multidimensional nature of biblical characters, all of whom are included with intention.

One weakness of the book is the quick flip from theory in Part 1 to participant responses in Part 2. While Steffen and Neu offer multiple rich reactions to Neu’s facilitating the three EBC groups, the authors give little attention to the research design. I found myself asking questions such as: How large were the groups? Why were these populations chosen? How did the storying process differ from other models, such as Chronological Bible Storying or Simply the Story?

Yet this weakness by no means detracts from the book's powerful message. The message remains that theology formed through the oral exploration of biblical characters in stories empowers, deepens, and transforms hearts. The authors' journey, the expanded understanding of biblical characters, and the challenge to unlearn unhelpful Western perspectives which contribute to this transformative message. As Steffen and Neu point out,

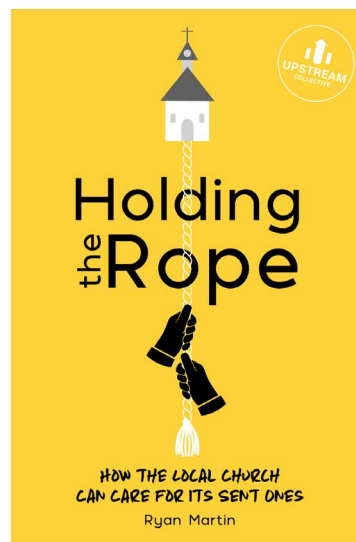
Stories show rather than tell, enact rather than explain, illuminate rather than spell out, demonstrate rather than define, embody rather than conceptualize, encounter rather than detail, exhibit rather than exhort, suggest rather than state. Stories thereby intentionally leave much to the imagination and heighten emotions within the decoding community. Stories, first and foremost, speak from the heart to the heart. Stories exchange human experiences, offering a possible reimaged world. Stories create within us an insatiable hunger for more stories. Got stories? (30)

**Martin, Ryan. *Holding the Rope: How the Local Church Can Care for Its Sent Ones*. Knoxville, Tennessee: Upstream Collective, 2022.**

**Reviewed by Geoff Bowen, IMB Personnel, North Africa and the Middle East.**

With the release of *Holding the Rope: How the Local Church Can Care for Its Sent Ones*, Ryan Martin has provided a valuable resource for churches who want to care well for those they send to serve cross-culturally. Ryan's experience as missions pastor in the local church and current role as Director of Missions and Operations for LightBearers (lightbearers.com) gives him a broad perspective on the unique relationship between missionaries, their local church and the agencies that send them. Martin's primary target audience is sending churches with a desire to assist churches to see that sending members to the ends of the earth is not the finish line; rather, it is the beginning of a partnership to support and sustain care for missionaries through pre-field, on-field, and post-field care.

The book begins with a broad view of the biblical and theological foundation of missionary care. Drawing from three key passages (3 John 5-8, Philippians 2:25-30, and Acts 14:26-28), Martin addresses the need to identify, assess, equip and send members on mission, care and support them on the field, and give them opportunity to report, rest, and recharge when returning from the field. He then explores the relationship between the



church and the sending agency, with an emphasis on how their roles and responsibilities for missionary care are complementary rather than exclusive. He highlights the need for consistent and on-going communication to clarify expectations between the two. The appendix of the book includes valuable examples and templates of models of care strategies. These include pre-, on- and post-field components drawn from several churches of various sizes and contexts. Martin also includes an extensive bibliography for readers who want to go deeper in their exploration of caring for sent ones.

Throughout the book, I found Martin's emphasis on the local church's primary responsibility to support gospel workers a helpful one, recognizing that there is a gap for many on-field workers are in this relationship. Martin's book can help churches develop a comprehensive and helpful strategy of care to close this gap. He mentions the unique needs of TCKs, singles, wives and couples in strategy development. He also acknowledges that there are cases in which care can negatively impact retention. Ryan champions the need for Advocacy Teams and on-field visits as vital components to maintaining on-going care relationships.

I read  *Holding the Rope*  through multiple lenses: over 30 years of local church ministry including sending and going on short-term trips, three terms as a sent one to Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, and as a parent with children who have served in Southeast Asia, Canada, South America, and Northeast Africa. I found myself challenged by insights that "I wish I had known when I was sending" to have developed a more robust care strategy for ones we sent out. Encouraging the development of Advocacy Teams could be a key element to continuing care even through normal transitions local churches experience, such as staff transition.

As we begin our next term, there are conversations that we will have with our sending church that will be enriched by Martin's observations. And, as a father, I expect to use the principles presented to have deeper and more meaningful conversations with my children as they serve. This book could be helpful to field and team leaders who are interviewing and assimilating new team members into their organizations to help them advocate for themselves and their needs as they have conversations with their sending churches about how to best support them on the field.

Churches who send, care, and receive well develop healthy relationships and partnerships with their missionaries and the agencies that support them.



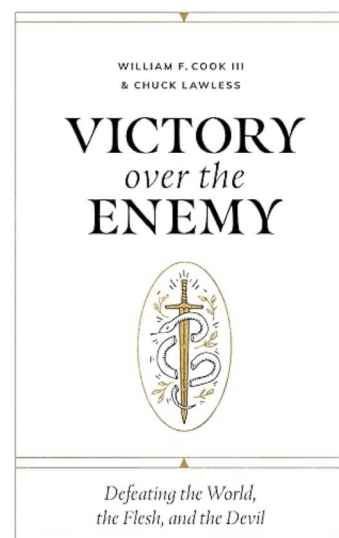
*Holding the Rope*  is a helpful resource for sending churches to develop and strengthen comprehensive care to those they have sent. For missionaries who see the need to facilitate conversations with their sending churches, I also commend  *Returning Well: Your Guide to Thriving Back “Home” after Serving Cross-Culturally*  by Melissa Chaplin. This resource will help missionaries identify personal areas of need to help them communicate with their sending church how that congregation might go deeper in their supporting and caring relationships.

**Cook, William F., and Charles E. Lawless. *Victory over the Enemy: Defeating the World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023.**

**Reviewed by Clara Turner , IMB Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim**

The book, *Victory over the Enemy: Defeating the World, the Flesh, and the Devil* is an invaluable resource for believers. All believers encounter spiritual warfare. The topic of this book is both relevant and timely to experience victory over the enemy. Dr. Cook and Dr. Lawless strike a balance between theology supported by Scripture while also keeping the text readable and digestible. The book covers three sections: recognizing the enemy, knowing God's provisions, and disciplining our lives for victory. The pages of all three sections are saturated with God's Word, serving as a key reminder that our victory has already been won. We fight from that place of victory using God's word as our guide. The beginning of the Bible starts with God and it ends with God, therefore that is where our focus should remain. "As ominous as this sounds, Satan is not God's equal. He was created by God, exists under God's sovereign control, is limited by God in what God allows him to do, was decisively defeated at the cross, and one day will be thrown into the lake of fire" (10). While Satan is the enemy, we need not dwell on him or his limited power. Our God, creator of all, reigns supreme!

This book has several strengths and a single weakness. Strengths include a deep commitment to Scripture, appropriate use of personal stories, and a logical progression through



reality towards victory. As mentioned previously, the pages of the book are drenched in Scripture. With Jesus as our example, we see He quoted Scripture when tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13). He rebuked the temptations of the enemy with the Word of God. Therefore, we too should be well versed in Scripture that we might close our hearts toward the lure of the evil one. The authors showed the reader how to pursue Scripture by referring to it frequently and including an exhortation to memorize these words of life as well. In books on spiritual warfare, there can be a tendency to overuse personal stories. However, this book uses personal stories sparingly, humbly, and poignantly to emphasize an experience rather than to pridefully show current places of personal victory. This restraint strengthens the book. A final strength of this book is the division of sections and the progression of how to be victorious in spiritual battle. Being able to swiftly and correctly recognize the enemy allows us to tap into God's provisions more quickly, in turn guiding us into a disciplined lifestyle of victory. This linear progression makes the pathway to victory easy to remember and quick to recall in moments of temptation. A singular weakness was the lack of pastoral or prewritten prayers. The conclusion of the book ends with a lovely pastoral prayer. Each chapter of the book would have ended stronger had they all had a pastoral prayer or a prayer to pray over oneself as the closing words.

Life on the field has proven to be full of spiritual warfare. Several nearby neighborhoods are enveloped in palatable darkness. The cycle of evil spirits bothering the sleep of children is commonplace. The air between heaven and earth becomes heavy and it is a fight to reach out towards Christ, especially during Ramadan, an Islamic season of fasting. This book provides the reader with specific encouragement in this fight. One particularly encouraging quote drives believers to return to the Gospel, receive the grace God freely gives, and march onward filled anew with His power. "Past spiritual victories and blessings are not sufficient for future battles. Past godliness can never be an excuse for present disobedience." (pg. 97) In addition, since this book is rooted in God's Word and the main premise in strategy to live victoriously focuses on *obedience*, that makes this idea simple to recreate as we share this with our local brothers and sisters in discipleship relationship. What better truth to impart than to highlight the outcome of consistent obedience to the Father?

In summary, this book will surely bless, stretch, and encourage you as you serve the Lord on the field. When read and applied, you can expect to encounter the Lord in a new and fresh way as you grow deeper in your understanding

of how to claim victory over the enemy. For further reading, you might enjoy the following books. *Discipled Warriors* by Dr. Chuck Lawless, gives great insight and detail on how to equip the church for spiritual warfare. *Brokenness, the Heart God Revives* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss, leads you through brokenness into repentance and finally into a great movement of God in your life. Lastly, *Coming to a Place of Abiding, a Prayer Mentor Booklet Series* by Clyde J Hodson moves through prayers from Scripture and the names of God to pray over your life or ministry.